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THE STANDARD OF  
PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH

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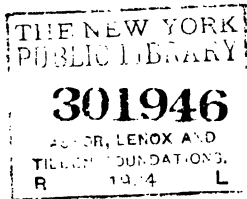
Published March, 1904.

ROY WALKER  
CLUB  
HARPER

TO

FRANCIS ANDREW MARCH

PROFESSOR OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND  
OF COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY IN LAFAYETTE  
COLLEGE, THIS TREATISE IS DEDICATED AS  
A SLIGHT TOKEN OF RESPECT FOR HIS CHAR-  
ACTER AND OF ESTEEM FOR HIS SCHOLARSHIP



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Published March, 1904.

Boy with  
Blue  
Yarn

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## PREFACE

THE idea which underlies the present essay originally constituted the subject of an address delivered at Easton in 1895. The occasion was the celebration held then and there in honor of the distinguished scholar to whom this little work is dedicated. At that time only a portion was given of the illustrative material which had been brought together. At a still later period additions were made to the address as originally prepared. From it thus enlarged selections were printed in the shape of two articles which appeared in *Harper's Magazine* for September and November, 1903. The whole treatise is now included in the present volume.

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A complete list of the words, the pronunciation of which has for any reason received consideration in the body of the work, can be found at the end. The number of these is large; there would have been no difficulty in making it very much larger. In no case, however, have they been introduced for any other purpose than to illustrate a principle; and if those given fail to convince the reader of the truth of the views here advanced, it would be useless to multiply examples. Pains have further been taken to select, whenever possible, words in regard to which exists the interest of present controversy. About the propriety or impropriety of the pronunciation in any given case no judgment is expressed. My office has been to record, to the best of my knowledge, differences of opinion and of practice which have prevailed in the past or are prevailing now.

**THE STANDARD OF  
PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH**





## THE STANDARD OF PRONUNCIATION IN ENGLISH

### I

THE first serious attempt which history records to fix a standard of pronunciation—the first, at least, so far as I am aware—took place in Palestine more than a thousand years before the coming of Christ. The account of it is given in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Judges. The men of Gilead had just overcome the children of Ephraim in a decisive battle. They had furthermore anticipated their defeated enemies in occupying the passages of the

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Jordan. "And it was so," continues the Bible story, "that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said Nay; then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand."

It cannot be decided with absolute certainty whether the forty-two thousand Ephraimites just mentioned included the men who were slain in the preceding battle or consisted exclusively of those who failed to pass satisfactorily in pronunciation at the examination then conducted at the passages of the Jordan. In the discussion of the present question

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that point is for us really immaterial. The moral the incident enforces is quite independent of the number of those who perished from their lack of conformity to the Gileadite view of orthoepey. It is a general principle that is taught by it; and the lesson it conveys is just as applicable to the present time as it ever was to the past. The fate which befell the Ephraimites is the kind of fate which in our secret hearts we all feel to be the one strictly due to those perverted and perverse beings who will persist in pronouncing words in a way we deem improper.

Modern sentimentalism will no longer allow us to resort to the drastic measures for establishing what we deem correct usage which were then adopted by the men of Gilead. Yet unless I mistake entirely the nature of the opinions con-

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stantly heard in conversation and expressed in print, the spirit which animates the latest devotees of what they consider the only proper pronunciation is in nowise different from that of those who more than three thousand years ago set up a test of their own in Palestine. On this subject men continue to be divided now, as they were then, into Gileadites and Ephraimites. Even the word *pronunciation* itself has been erected into a shibboleth. Some vigorously insist that the syllable *ci* should be sounded as "she," others just as vigorously insist that it shall be sounded as "se." The punishment men visit upon those who fail to conform to their standard is necessarily in consonance with the spirit of the times to which they belong. But while the penalty varies, the feelings which prompt

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its infliction remain in all ages the same. If we cannot slay the Ephraimite, we can vituperate him. We can point at him the finger of scorn; we can uplift the nose of derision; we can curl the lip of contempt. We can force upon his consciousness a general sense of social and intellectual inferiority which wealth cannot condone and station will make only the more conspicuous.

Modern philanthropy, which lets nothing escape its clutches, has accordingly felt itself called upon to come, as far as possible, to the rescue of these social pariahs from the verbal pitfalls which beset them on every side. It is not enough that our great dictionaries should set forth the pronunciation of the words they record. A multitude of manuals are constantly brought out which undertake to show us not only how we ought

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to pronounce, but also how we ought not to pronounce. In fact, societies have occasionally been formed for the purpose of carrying out this same laudable object. But the question at once arises, Who is it that has taught the teachers? How are we to know that the guides who assume to lead us are guides whom we can trust? That is to say, where is to be found the standard of pronunciation to which we are all bound to conform? Who established it? Who maintain it? Who are the persons invested with the authority to decide for us in any given case how it is our duty to pronounce, and how did they come to be so invested? These are questions that at once present themselves to him who gives serious thought to the subject. Nor are they so easily answered as our self-constituted instructors seem to think. Limited

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knowledge enables us to speak with positiveness; fuller knowledge invariably makes us hesitate.

Every one who is familiar with the periodical literature of both Great Britain and America has constantly forced upon his attention the existence of a class of persons who rejoice in the consciousness of knowing that the pronunciation they have is the best which exists. For the orthoepic Pharisee is never content with thanking the Lord that he is not as other men. He wants some one else besides his Creator to be aware of the fact; and he cannot rest easy until he has communicated the information to the outside world through the agency of the press. The reason he gives for his self-satisfaction is usually one of the following two. The first is that he belongs both by birth and training to a particu-



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lar city or to a particular district of country. It is there, we are told, that the language is pronounced with the greatest purity. The inevitable inferiority in this respect of those who have been born and brought up elsewhere is impressed upon them gently or harshly according to the disposition of the speaker; but care is always taken that it shall be impressed firmly. It is sometimes delicately hinted, more often it is stoutly asserted, that for him who is brought up outside of a certain region there is little or no hope of attaining that exquisite intonation or modulation of voice which is the peculiar birthright of its inhabitants. The more kindly disposed of the children of this favored soil condescend to express regret for the unhappy lot of those who have been reared outside of the sacred pale. It is not their fault,

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to be sure—for clearly everybody cannot be born in the same place—but by an inscrutable dispensation of providence, it has been made their misfortune.

But much more emphatic and thorough-going is the second reason given. In it the social distinction is set up. Alongside of it the barriers of birth-place are hardly worthy of being taken into consideration. There is a mystic inner circle, it is intimated, into which only the orthoepically pure can ever penetrate. A particular pronunciation of a particular word reveals at once to its members that the unfortunate perpetrator does not belong to the company of the elect. "Thy speech bewrayeth thee," said the servants to Peter. The Galilean, in spite of his denials, stood disclosed to the humblest inhabitant of the holy city. The same

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state of things continues yet. There are occasionally to be found, even among the fairly well educated, those who assure us that the way certain other educated persons pronounce certain words reveals unmistakably the hall-mark of social inferiority if not that of vulgarity. These latter may be conceded to be respectable, but they cannot be reckoned really high-bred. The conviction of orthoepic righteousness which springs from the consciousness of social position far surpasses in strength that which arises from birth in a particular place. But when the two chance to meet in the same person, the authority arising from the combination is felt, at least by the man himself, to be absolutely unassailable. It is sufficient to establish in his own eyes the infallibility of his oracular utterances, and to justify

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his contempt for the presumption which ventures to dispute them.

The most saddening thing for those shut out of the sacred precincts just indicated is the hopelessness of their situation. For them there is no relief in sight. As a remedy against the consequences of this exclusion we learn that not even the highest education is of any avail. From that quarter can come no help; in truth, rather harm. For at times we have of late been given to understand that the spread of education is distinctly detrimental to culture. As regards propriety of pronunciation, the latter too often suffers from the increasing prevalence of the former. The lamentable effects wrought by it have, to some extent, been made a subject of complaint in the periodical press. A short quotation will furnish an illustra-

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tion of a view which is sincerely held by some, is heard frequently in conversation, and is occasionally met with in print. This particular passage is found in a letter which appeared in the columns of a London weekly of a date no further back than 1900: "At one time (some twenty years ago)," wrote the correspondent, "the pronunciation of *interesting* was a fair criterion of social position, but owing to the spread of education, education and culture are no longer synonymous, and teaching is now principally in the hands of those who may be said to be highly educated without having been surrounded by persons of culture in their youth. Hence all sorts of strange departures in the way of pronunciation."

To culture of the sort here indicated education will be more than deleterious.

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It will be destructive; for in the long run it will even reach the class who confound their own ignorance with culture. Yet the illusions about this matter are so agreeable, they bring with them a satisfaction so profound, that by many it may be deemed an act of almost wanton maliciousness to say anything which tends to ruffle the complacency of persons, frequently very worthy if not particularly well informed, who give utterance to views such as have just been expressed. But no anxiety need be felt on their account. No criticism will ever disturb the serenity of their convictions about themselves or their utterance. It will never occur to them that the pronunciation they so fondly cherish is right in their eyes for no other reason at all than that it is the one which they have been accustomed to hear in the

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little set to which they belong. The humble outsider, seeking for an unsailable standard, might accept meekly their pronouncements did he not encounter differing ones coming from persons boasting the same birthplace as the preceding and belonging to the same social grade. The two parties, he finds, are constantly coming into collision. Unseemly disputes prevail. Both sides are equally opinionated, equally pugnacious, and, as he at last is forced to conclude, equally ignorant. How, then, in this perpetual conflict of opinion, can one expect to discover the exact truth? How in any given case can we hope to know whether the pronunciation indicated is right or wrong? Some help towards clearing up the obscurity which surrounds the subject may be gained by ascertaining, in the first place, the precise

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nature of the difficulty attending it, and, in the second place, the efforts to remove it which have been resorted to in the past.

Two general statements can be made at the outset. One is that there is a body of English words certain pronunciations of which every cultivated man the world over recognizes at once as belonging to the speech of the uneducated or the imperfectly educated. We characterize them as illiterate. The use of them stamps everywhere the present social condition of the speaker or proclaims the class from which he sprang. Allied to this, although representative of a distinctly different grade of cultivation, is what may be called the geographical pronunciation. There are orthoepical peculiarities which belong to a certain region or to certain regions.



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They are unconsciously adopted by him who has heard them from infancy. If an educated man, he may, and usually does, discard them in later life. Even if he chooses to cling to them, he recognizes that they are provincial, that they are not sanctioned by the best general usage. Yet it is not always an easy matter to shake them off even if he desires so to do. If once fastened upon him in early youth, he is liable at times to revert to them in moments of carelessness or excitement.

This is the first point. But for most of us there is no more difficulty in avoiding what is clearly illiterate or provincial pronunciation than there is in avoiding the violation of the ordinary rules of grammar. The second point is of more importance in this discussion. This is that another and very much larger body

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of words exists—embracing, in fact, the immense majority of the words of the language used in conversation or public address—about which there is a substantial agreement among the cultivated, wherever English is spoken at all. A substantial agreement, it must be kept in mind, not an exact agreement. No one's pronunciation ever resembles another's precisely, any more than one man's watch keeps precisely the same time as another man's. Furthermore, no one's pronunciation is exactly the same under all circumstances. There are, besides, numerous variations of speech which the trained ear of the phonetic scholar instantly recognizes, but which entirely escape the observation of most of us. Much more perceptible is the variation between the speech of the cultivated classes of different com-

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munities, of different regions, of different lands. It is sometimes so marked that the moment we hear a man's voice we recognize without difficulty the country or part of the country which has given him birth.

In a discussion of this sort it is hardly necessary to observe that it is the usage of the educated body alone which is assumed to be under consideration. The pronunciation of the illiterate no one thinks of referring to, save occasionally for the amiable purpose of imputing it to those with whom he chances to differ. As has just been pointed out, the usage of the men of this educated body, so far as regards the immense majority of words, is essentially the same where English is spoken. It is marked, indeed, by variations of intonation, of modulation, and, to some extent, of accentuation.

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But, after all, these variations are not only few in number, comparatively speaking; they are really of slight importance. They do not interfere with mutual understanding, nor do they create embarrassment. In the ordinary intercourse of life they can be and they are ignored. To go back to the comparison just used, our watches all purport to keep the same time. In one sense they do, in another they do not. But their failure in agreement is of so little moment that we feel no hesitation in placing upon them the fullest reliance in all arrangements we set out to make with one another.

Accordingly, in the case just specified—that of illiterate pronunciation and that of cultivated pronunciation of most of our speech—we find no trouble in choosing the right course. It is between

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these two extremes that the real difficulty manifests itself. There exists a goodly number of words in regard to which the usage of the educated varies, and often varies decidedly. This fact has been brought prominently to the attention of most of us in recent years by the multiplication of pronouncing dictionaries. As a single illustration out of many that could be cited, let us select the adjectives ending in *-ile*. By some lexicographers this termination is sounded *il*, by others *il*. As an example of the class, take the word *hostile*. Generally in the earlier English dictionaries which set out to give correct usage—for instance, those of Sheridan and Walker and of Smart's revision of Walker—it was pronounced *hos'til*. Such it continues to be at the present day in American dictionaries. But in

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most of the late English ones—such as Stormonth's and the two which go respectively under the names of the Imperial and the Encyclopædic—it is pronounced *hos-tile'*. The new Oxford dictionary gives both pronunciations, but puts *hos-tile'* first.

Take again the class of words beginning with *wh*, such as *while*, *when*, and *Whig*. If we can trust certain authorities, the pronunciation of the aspirate in polite society in England is the exception and not the rule. In America the condition of things is certainly the reverse. Or, to come down from classes to single words, the prevailing English pronunciation of *schedule* is represented as being *shed'-ül*; that of America is ordinarily *sked'-yül*. These are divergences that attain almost the dignity of national distinctions. Yet, as a whole, they

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are not numerous, nor do they compare in importance with the differences in the speech of individuals belonging to the same country or even to the same community. It is about their varying pronunciation of words that controversy rages. What is the proper usage in any particular case? Lucky is he who with us is the first to secure the passages of the Jordan—that is, in this day, the authority of all the dictionaries. Here it is that the men of Gilead now slay the children of Ephraim.

The time has been purposely limited to the present. It is very evident that there was once a period when great liberty was allowed in the matter of pronunciation. The earliest dictionaries made no effort to indicate it. Some works, indeed, appeared in the seventeenth century and the first part of the

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eighteenth which paid a slight attention to the subject. Most of these, however, dealt with the rectification of the orthography. Any remarks about orthoepy contained in them were incidental. Certain principles were laid down, and to illustrate these, the pronunciation of a number of words would be given. Anomalies, too, were sometimes pointed out. But there was no work in which orthoepy was made a regular feature, still less a prominent one. Nor did the dictionaries which followed after the treatises just mentioned make for a long time much of an advance in this direction. The furthest they went was to point out upon what syllable of the word the accent should rest. Even so much disposition as this to slake the thirst for useful information was manifested almost reluctantly. Before Dr.



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Johnson's dictionary appeared, in 1755, Bailey's was held in the highest estimation and had the largest circulation. It was originally published in 1721; but it was not until the fifth edition of 1733 that any attempt was made in it to mark the syllable upon which the stress should fall. This for many years after was the *ultima Thule* of adventure in the direction of indicating pronunciation.

The pronouncing dictionary is, in truth, a comparatively modern invention. A hundred and fifty years ago it did not exist; even a hundred years ago it had not attained to anything like the respect with which it is now regarded. No extraordinary desire, indeed, could have been felt at first for such a work. Had there been, we may be sure it would have been gratified. Every man of cultiva-

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tion was once, within reasonable limits, a law unto himself. All such persons assumed, as some do still, that the pronunciation they employed was the very best possible, simply because it was their own pronunciation. This priceless treasure was theirs by the right of inheritance. Naturally, one of the class would resent any attempt on the part of his neighbor to impose upon him a different usage. Much more would he be inclined to resent the impertinence which presumed to stigmatize his usage as exhibiting peculiarities and improprieties. He felt not the least necessity of deferring to the opinions of some one else, whose principal claim to authority was that he had taken the trouble to get his practice into print.

In the course of time, however, there has ensued a complete change of front.

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The pronouncing dictionary has not only come, but it is treated with a deference to which, at the outset, it was an utter stranger. It seems as if its production must have been due in the first instance to the desire for a work of such a nature, manifested by the imperfectly educated middle class, rising more and more into social prominence. The members of this body wanted somebody to tell them precisely what to say and how to say it. They did not care to exercise the right of private judgment, or, rather, they did not have sufficient faith in their own cultivation to trust it. Authority was what they were after; and when men are longing for authority on any subject, some one will be considerate enough of their welfare, and confident enough in his own sufficiency, to come forward and furnish it. We see the same thing con-

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stantly exemplified to-day in the case of disputed points of linguistic usage. It is not necessary for the self-appointed instructor to know. All that is required of him is that he shall be positive: then his disciples will receive with meekness and gratitude the information or misinformation which he condescends to impart.

It was about the middle of the eighteenth century that the craving for a pure and perfect orthoepic guide began to manifest itself in a way that required relief. Dr. Johnson's dictionary had been published in 1755. For general purposes it became at once and long remained the standard. It was only in a few instances, however, that it made any attempt to go beyond its immediate predecessors in the matter of indicating pronunciation. Like them, it generally

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contented itself with marking the syllable upon which the stress of voice should fall. This was felt not to be enough. Accordingly, before the end of the century a number of works came out to supply a want which was becoming urgent. Two men there are—Thomas Sheridan and John Walker—who emerge conspicuously from the ranks of those who strove to establish a standard pronunciation. The first was well known in his time as an actor, better known later as a lecturer on elocution, best known to most of us now as the father of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. The second was also an actor, not so well known in this capacity as the preceding, but with full as great a reputation as a lecturer on elocution. But besides these two, there was a large number of others who made it their aim to instruct their

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fellow - men in this matter. In truth, during the eighth decade of the eighteenth century a sort of lexical epidemic broke out. Between the beginning of 1773 and the end of 1775, particularly, appeared the dictionaries of Kenrick, Barclay, Ash, and Perry, and all had a good deal to say on the subject of orthoepy.

It was Sheridan, perhaps, who first conceived the idea of bringing out a dictionary in which pronunciation should be a leading, if not the leading, feature. But if so, he was not the first to carry the project into execution. This was the work of a certain James Buchanan. His name indicates his nationality. Early in 1757 he appeared as the author of a small English dictionary in which, besides other things, he marked the long and short sounds of the vowels, distin-

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guished the silent letters, and pointed out the number of syllables of which each word consisted. "Thus was I the first," he said in a later work, "who endeavored to make the proper pronunciation of our language of easy acquisition to foreigners, and to introduce an uniform one for the sake of the natives; amongst whom it is still so notoriously vague and unstable." An attempt of an essentially similar kind was made somewhat later by another Scotchman named William Johnston. His work appeared in 1764. Furthermore, in that year there came out anonymously a little volume of the same nature, designed for the use of schools. It was described by a reviewer of the time as a "well-meant attempt for ascertaining the pronunciation and purity of the language." These things

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are conclusive proof that the desire and demand for an orthoepic guide was in the air. Less than two years after the appearance of the dictionaries just mentioned, Buchanan followed up his previous essay by bringing out a much more ambitious work devoted to pronunciation and to nothing else. It was dedicated with the most profound reverence to the two august Houses of the British Parliament. Its title-page explained its object. It was there called "an essay towards establishing a standard for an elegant and uniform pronunciation of the English language throughout the British dominions, as practised by the most learned and polite speakers." It was, as its title-page further declared, "a work entirely new." Nothing like it had appeared before; perhaps nothing like it has appeared since. It



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was a pronouncing dictionary pure and simple. It contained no definitions. It was a list of over twenty-seven thousand words arranged in double columns, in one column spelled as written, in the other spelled as pronounced.

But in those early days there was no disposition to pay respect to the man who set himself up as an authority. The author of this essay towards establishing an elegant and uniform pronunciation was speedily made to know the opinion entertained of his qualifications for acting as a guide to his fellow-men. "Mr. Buchanan," said the most influential review of the time, "does not appear to understand how English is pronounced by polite and just speakers."<sup>1</sup> This is

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Review*, vol. xxxiii., p. 493, December, 1765. Buchanan's work, however, bore the date of 1766 on its title-page.

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the sort of criticism we are at heart inclined to bestow upon all those whose usage differs from our own. We are now somewhat timid about its utterance; but in the eighteenth century it was expressed openly and fearlessly. It was a further objection made to the work by this same critical periodical that seeing the word spelled as it was pronounced would insensibly lead the reader to spell wrongly. Later this was much insisted upon by Kenrick in his censure of Buchanan. The worship of the orthographical fetich was already under full headway.

Still, the most striking result of the successive appearance of these dictionaries was the revelation it brought of the important differences both of opinion and of practice that prevailed. As they came out, one after another, a series of

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controversies went on in regard to the pronunciations authorized by their compilers. These were made the subject of comment, in the shape of attack or of commendation, in the critical periodicals of the time. Such controversies show that men quarrelled then about the matter just as they do now, and not unfrequently over the very same words. Each disputant was as positive then as he is now that he was in possession of the best possible pronunciation, and was just as ready to charge vulgarity or slovenly practice upon those whose usage was different from his own. In *humble* shall the aspirate be sounded or not? Shall the *ea* of *heart* have the sound it has in *heart* or that in *earth*? Shall *leisure* be pronounced so as to rhyme with *pleasure* or with *seizure*? These are illustrations of scores of questions

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which were discussed, and about which contradictory views were very positively expressed.

Several words there were, indeed, in regard to which much feeling was aroused. One of these was the past participle of the substantive verb. Shall *been* be pronounced so as to rhyme with *seen* or *sin*? On this subject of never-ending controversy orthoepists ranged themselves in hostile camps, and the members of each party felt themselves at liberty to affect a lofty superiority to those belonging to the other. About the middle of the following century, Hawthorne, in relating his consular experiences, tells us that this word was the best shibboleth he could hit upon to detect the English rogue appealing to him for aid from the genuine Yankee article. He considered it a national dis-

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tinction. The English, he said, invariably made it to rhyme with *green*, while the Americans, at least the Northerners, universally pronounced it *bin*. This may or may not be the case. The orthoepy of even a single community is a somewhat ticklish thing to handle; but when it comes to that of a whole country, the difficulty increases in at least an arithmetical ratio. Certain it is that several of the most approved English authorities, both before and at the time Hawthorne was writing, favored what he styled the American pronunciation. It was that which had been given by Sheridan. His contemporary, Walker, indeed, assured us that *been* "is scarcely ever heard otherwise than as the noun *bin*, a repository for corn or wine." It was the only one of the two pronunciations authorized by Smart, Walker's re-

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viser. The new English dictionary of the Philological Society sanctions both.

One of the words about the pronunciation of which orthoepists disputed then remains full as much a subject of dispute now. The attitude exhibited towards it at present is a striking illustration of how states of mind repeat themselves. The word in question is *vase*. This enjoys a distinction, granted to few other terms, of having four different pronunciations, if, indeed, we cannot say five. Of these, three at least were in existence from the beginning. Two of the pronunciations affected the sound of *s*, two that of *a*. In the case of the consonant variation, the word, according to one method, rymed with *case*, according to the other with *daze*. During the eighteenth century the former was the pronunciation generally, though

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far from exclusively, favored by orthoepists. But this attitude was largely reversed when the latter method was adopted and urgently insisted upon by Walker. He himself had heard, he said, the *s* universally sounded as *z*. His advocacy of that pronunciation, owing to his wide acceptance as an authority, very materially extended its use. But the other held its ground. Consequently, through the early and the middle part of the nineteenth century English orthoepists were largely divided into two factions on this point, each of which was hardly disposed to concede the existence of the practice sanctioned by the other.

But there was also a difference about the pronunciation of the vowel. This variation must have been in existence from the beginning; but it was not until a period near our own time that it came

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into much prominence. There was one sound of it which eighteenth-century orthoepists had heard, or at least had heard of; for it was occasionally made the subject of comment. It was the one in which *a* would be represented by *aw*. The only authority who sanctioned it was Elphinston; but its actual existence was conceded by others. Nares, indeed, declared that it was often used; "but," he added, "I think, affectedly." To the same purport spoke Walker. By a few, he said, the *a* was pronounced like *aw*; but "this," he continued, "being too refined for the general ear, is now but seldom heard." Such was the mild way in which he spoke of it in one place; in another he followed Nares in terming it affected. It is very clear that this pronunciation of the vowel was not looked upon with favor by eighteenth-



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century orthoepists. Yet it must have been long in use, however little recognized. One of the earlier ways of spelling the word was *vause*; and this could only have been resorted to in order to make it accord with the pronunciation it received. Though frowned upon, it continued to flourish and won its way to more and more acceptance. But there was yet another pronunciation in which the vowel had the force of *a* in *father*. This seems to have added a further complication to usage, caused by some giving to *s* the sound of *z*, and by others giving it that heard in *case*. It is not easy to say when this second pronunciation of the vowel first appeared; but it did not make itself much felt until the latter half of the nineteenth century. Before it the *aw* sound appears to be retiring; at least that is an

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impression entertained by many. Still the four pronunciations continue to flourish to-day, one of them prevailing in one quarter, and another in another. In certain places they may be said to be, after a manner, fighting one another. This general condition of things is more than likely to be perpetuated indefinitely.

The disposition of the accent gave rise to perhaps the most heated discussion. About its positions, which now seem very singular to us, were often taken then. Kenrick was severely arraigned by one of his reviewers for laying the stress upon the last syllable of *July*. *European* was a word about which controversy raged with much violence. Should the principal accent rest upon the penult or the antepenult? There was a good deal to be said upon both sides, and it was fre-

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quently said with asperity. In 1782 the *European Magazine* was started. Early in its history an irate correspondent wrote a letter to it, expressing his disgust with the way the city beaux, as he termed them, pronounced its name. He represented them as saying, "Waiter, bring me the *Europē'an Magazine*." All intelligent people knew, he added, that the word was derived from *Europe*; it should, therefore, be *Eurōp'ean*. The other way he had never heard save from "the students in monthly publications." These he clearly regarded as constituting a contemptible class of men.<sup>1</sup> But almost as bitter as the controversy in regard to the syllable upon which the accent should rest was the disagreement, in the case of certain words, as to the pronun-

<sup>1</sup> *European Magazine*, vol. ii., p. 263, October, 1782.

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ciation of the syllable itself. Of two given ones, which reflected best the usage of the best society? On points like these professed orthoepists frequently took opposite sides; and the contempt each had for the opinion of the other could hardly be spoken of as concealed. One of the matters in dispute was the propriety of interposing a sound resembling *e* when *k* or a hard *g* or *c* preceded the vowel *a* or *i*. The philologist Robert Nares observed in a work he produced on the 'Elements of Orthoepy' that "*ky-ind* for *kind* is a monster of pronunciation heard only on our stage."<sup>1</sup> This remark much grieved Walker. He took to it the most decided exception. Nares he conceded to be a very solid and ingenious writer on

<sup>1</sup> 'Elements of Orthoepy,' p. 28.

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the subject of orthoepy; but in this particular he was utterly mistaken. The practice condemned by him was the practice of polite speakers. It was no fanciful peculiarity this, but a usage arising from euphony and the analogy of the language. The coalescence of the sound like the consonant *y* with the letters between which it is interposed gave a certain mellowness to the pronunciation. So Walker assured us. In accordance with this view he represented *a garden* and *a guard* by the formations *eggyardin* and *eggyard*.

Modern orthoepists accept usage as they find it, or suppose they find it, with little disposition to dispute it; the earlier ones had no inclination to assume a passive attitude when such usage disagreed with their conceptions of propriety. They looked in particular with

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a good deal of indignation upon certain pronunciations which were at marked variance from the orthography. They could not comprehend how these ever came to exist in the first place, nor could they find any justification for their continuing to be retained. As a general rule these peculiarities were survivals. They represented a spelling which had once existed but had now passed away. One of the terms specially objectionable was *China*, which, as a designation of the ware so called, even at the beginning of the nineteenth century, continued to be almost universally pronounced *Chayny*. This usage, under the operation of an influence yet to be considered, has long ceased to be fashionable. Yet, without doubt, traces of it are still to be found in certain quarters. As late as 1855, Thackeray, in his novel of 'The New-

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comes,' when speaking in his own person, mentions a "blue dragon Chayny jar"; but in so doing this acute observer of men and manners was unquestionably representing the practice of the persons about whom he was discoursing. *Colonel* was another rock of offence. It was perhaps, on the whole, the most heart-rending to the sticklers for what they deemed correct usage. The pronunciation *col'nel*, though sanctioned by Bailey and Dr. Johnson, was vulgar enough; but *kur'nel*, the only one now authorized, was atrociously vulgar. This latter pronunciation, coming down from *coronel*, the more ancient spelling of the word, remained for a long while a source of grief to many who recognized the impossibility of making a successful stand against this most abominable of perversions, as it was termed. They saw in

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its general adoption the triumph of usage over propriety. There is something almost pathetic in Walker's lamentation that "this word is among those gross irregularities which must be given up as incorrigible."

Still, in all the critical comments upon these tentative efforts to ascertain and fix pronunciation, there was an implied admission that the end aimed at was desirable. This remained none the less true even when lack of acquaintance with the best usage had made the method taken to arrive at it, in the particular case considered, more or less a failure. The demand, in truth, for the pronouncing dictionary was too continuous and pressing to permit the field to be unoccupied for any length of time. There were several who entered it besides those who have already been mentioned.



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The matter had from an early period attracted the attention of Sheridan. His original profession as an actor, his subsequent occupation as a teacher of elocution and lecturer upon it, had impressed him profoundly with the desirability of a complete work of this nature. The question of orthoepy was one of the topics upon which he constantly dilated in his treatises dealing with the difficulties of the English tongue. In 1769 he brought out a work entitled, 'A Plan of Education for the Young Nobility and Gentry.' In this the consideration of propriety of pronunciation occupied a conspicuous place. One of the objects he had in view was the delightfully fascinating dream of establishing exact uniformity of English speech over all the globe, not only in the rising generation, but for all future ones.

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Sheridan was an Irishman. Excepting him, most of the men who at the outset interested themselves in establishing a standard of pronunciation were Scotchmen. This was a fact that did not escape the notice of their compatriots in England engaged in similar undertakings. One of these new dictionaries was brought out by William Kenrick in 1773. In it the compiler professed to give, besides the definitions, not merely the orthography and etymology of the words, but also their pronunciation, "according to the present practice of polished speakers in the metropolis." The author of this particular dictionary was a sort of Ishmaelite man of letters, who dabbled in everything and attacked everybody who was meeting with any more success than himself. Still his remarks are worth noticing because they embody

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views which were afterwards to find frequent expression. "There seems," he wrote, "a most ridiculous absurdity in the pretensions of a native of Aberdeen or Tipperary to teach the natives of London to speak and to read. Various have been, nevertheless, the modest attempts of the Scots and Irish to establish a standard of English pronunciation. That they should not have succeeded is no wonder. Men cannot teach others what they do not themselves know." It may be added that Kenrick was told by one of his reviewers that certain of the usages he authorized were "more agreeable to the pronunciation of Welchmen than that of polite people in the metropolis."<sup>1</sup>

It was asserted at the time that Ken-

<sup>1</sup> *Critical Review*, vol. xxxvi., p. 344, November, 1773.

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rick sought to forestall the work of Sheridan, which was then well known to have been long in preparation. If such was the design, it failed completely. The first regular pronouncing dictionary on a large scale was the production of this same Irishman, who, because he was an Irishman, had been warned from undertaking the project at all. It came out in two large volumes, in 1780, and went through several editions before the end of the century. The title-page contained the assertion that one main object in the compilation of the work was to furnish a standard of pronunciation. Not many years after it was followed by the similar dictionary of John Walker. This became at once a favorite. It speedily displaced in the general popular estimation the other works of a similar character, though it never deprived

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them entirely either of circulation or of influence. For most Englishmen it may be considered as having been for a long period the standard of authority. It passed through numerous editions and underwent several revisions. Of these the remodelling which it received at the hands of Smart in 1836 met with the greatest success. This last work, and that of Worcester, were, according to Ellis, in his history on 'Early English Pronunciation,' the ones usually followed in England down to a comparatively recent period, so far as dictionaries were there followed at all. But shortly before the appearance of Smart's revision of Walker, James Knowles, the nephew of Sheridan, had also brought out a pronouncing dictionary. It attained a fair measure of success. In the United States Webster and Worcester divided

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honors during the middle of the nineteenth century, the former having much the more extensive circulation, the latter assuming a tone of loftier linguistic or rather orthographical virtue. Here have been specified the works, on the whole, most widely in use; but besides these there were numerous others.

There was one question in particular which the early makers of pronouncing dictionaries felt called upon to answer, but which the modern ones very calmly and without question very judiciously ignore. It is that with which the present discussion opened. Who gave them their authority to establish correct usage, or, at least, how did they happen to come by it? In every instance they put forward, directly or by implication, the claim that the orthoepy which they recommend is the very best. The title-pages of the

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works of Buchanan and Kenrick, as we have seen, represent the pronunciation laid down by them as being that of the most polished society. In a similar way Perry, in his Royal Standard Dictionary, which came out in 1775, informs us that it exhibits the true pronunciation, "according to the present practice of men of letters, eminent orators, and polite speakers in London." But the critics of that city did not seem always to recognize in it their own usage. Even those generally favorable insisted that in several instances he had countenanced vulgarisms. They took exception, for example, to a royal standard dictionary representing, as was done here, the pronunciation of *girl* as *garl* or *gal*.<sup>1</sup> There

<sup>1</sup> This statement is made on the authority of a notice of the first edition of 'Perry's Dictionary,' contained in the *Critical Review*, vol.

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still continued, in truth, the disposition on the part of every man to consider no one but himself as an authority. The feeling generally prevalent was represented by a certain William Scott, who, in 1786, felt called upon to add another pronouncing dictionary to those already before the public. To him the necessity of such action was obvious. All previous works of this nature, he assured us, were "extremely deficient in regard to the pronunciation of words." This want he felt capable of supplying. As was then usual, he declared that the pronunciation would be given "according to the present practice of the best speakers," and as was then usual, also, those who deemed themselves the best

xl., p. 486. In the only edition of it to which I have access—a much later one—no such pronunciation of *girl* is given.



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speakers found fault in many cases with the practice he recommended.

At the same time, all who investigated the subject, without any prejudice in favor of their own practice, had to admit that there was frequently a good deal of difficulty in deciding upon the best accepted usage. "The literati," said Perry, "who make etymology an invariable rule of pronunciation, often pronounce words in such a manner as to bring upon themselves the charge of affectation or pedantry." He added that, on the other hand, "mere men of the world, notwithstanding all their politeness, often retain so much of their provincial dialect, and commit such gross errors in speaking and writing, as to exclude them from the honor of being the standard of accurate pronunciation. Those who unite these two characters, and with the

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correctness and precision of true learning combine the ease and elegance of genteel life, may justly be styled the only true standard of propriety of speech." These words present the view theoretically accepted. The leading lexicographers, who prided themselves upon their orthoepy, did not question its justice. They felt bound, in consequence, to show that their right to be treated as authorities was due to the happy combination which had met in them of the correctness of learning and the elegance of gentility. Accordingly, their utterances on this point deserve much more attention than they have ever received.

First in order comes Sheridan. He was born at Quilca, in Ireland. His father, a teacher and a clergyman, was the intimate friend and chosen companion of Swift. It was to some extent upon

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the personal relations existing between these two that the son based his title to speak with authority. According to him, in the time of Queen Anne, the Augustan age of our literature, special attention was paid to the English language. It was then pronounced with the greatest uniformity and with the utmost elegance. When the House of Hanover, indifferent to learning and letters, came to the throne, this happy condition of things disappeared. Men became careless both in writing and speaking. But Sheridan had received his early education from a master—by whom he meant his father—who had been trained in the traditions of the old school, and who, through Swift, had ample facilities for acquiring the best pronunciation when pronunciation was at its best. To this master he read

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daily for hours, and received from him constant correction. Subsequently he had come in contact with the men of the age most distinguished for rank and genius, and the instruction he received in early youth he had reinforced by studying the utterance of the many wise and great whom he met.

We have here Sheridan's credentials from his own lips. He was an educated Irishman, who had been trained by another Irishman, and from him had received the pure pronunciation of the so-called Augustan age of our literature. This, he averred, was better than that which had preceded or that which had followed it. His original authority was, therefore, that of his father, and, by implication, that of Dean Swift. It was largely upon the respect due to the latter that he based his own claims to con-

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sideration. In so doing, Sheridan was justified to this extent, that there were not many subjects about which Swift was more particular than pronunciation. He insisted upon it in season, and sometimes, as it may seem to us, when it was distinctly out of season. Dr. Delany relates, for instance, that when any one of the clergy came to occupy his pulpit, the Dean would pull out his pencil and a piece of paper the moment the man began the delivery of his sermon.<sup>1</sup> He thus got himself ready to pounce upon any deviations the speaker made from the orthodox orthoepy. After the services were finished, he never failed to admonish the culprit of his errors. Delany seemed to look upon this course as

<sup>1</sup> 'Observations Upon Lord Orrery's Remarks on the Life and Writings of Dr. Jonathan Swift' (1754), p. 206.

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much to Swift's credit. It evinced a disinterested desire on his part to render his subordinates perfect in every particular. He could hardly have expected it to contribute to the fervor and effectiveness of a pulpit orator, to be conscious that all the while he is delivering his discourse there sits before him the sternest of judges, intent upon noting the words he uses, not for their fitness to impart spiritual instruction, but for the way they are pronounced. Here, too, comes in the ever-recurring question, Who taught Swift his pronunciation? He was born in Ireland. Nearly all his life was spent there before he attained his majority. It is natural to assume that he was affected by the peculiarities of the speech he was accustomed to hear constantly during the impressionable days of boy-

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- hood and youth. Assuredly, if his usage was represented accurately by Sheridan, he indulged in pronunciations which would have been characterized in England, at least later, as Irishisms.

The pronunciation originally derived in the manner just stated, Sheridan tells us, had been modified and developed by him to bring it into full accord with that of the age in which he lived. He had studied with care the usage that prevailed in the best society. This he had been privileged to enter everywhere. Accordingly, he was fitted both by early training and by later investigation of the subject to act as a guide to others. Any one so disposed can now accept Sheridan at his own valuation. But not so did his contemporaries. Naturally, rival lexicographers would criticise his

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orthoepy with severity. That was both a personal privilege and a professional duty. But his work did not escape ridicule from those who had no interest in any of the other pronouncing dictionaries issuing from the press. In particular his Irishisms, as they were called, were made a constant subject of reproach. There are a few words, for instance, in which *s* followed by *u* has the sound ordinarily denoted by *sh*. Sheridan extended this peculiarity to a number of others—in fact, to all beginning with the prefix *super*. If this sound was heard in *sure* and *sugar* and *issue*, he seemed to see no reason why it should not be found in *suicide* and *superstition*. Accordingly, the first syllables of these he pronounced as if they were spelled *shoo-icide*, *shoo-per-stition*. From this and other views of his there was, natu-



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rally, dissent. Indeed, a little later a pamphlet was brought out, and ran through several editions, entitled 'A Caution to Gentlemen Who Use Sheridan's Dictionary.' It praised him highly in many ways; but as regards orthoepy, no mercy was shown to his imputed errors. One damning charge there was, from which it was impossible for him to free himself. "He was," said his critic, "an Irishman; and to the last period of his life his origin was obvious in his pronunciation."

Next came Walker. Like Sheridan, no small share of his life had been spent in the theatrical profession. Much of the time he had been under Garrick himself, and had noted with care the pronunciation of the greatest actor who ever trod the English stage. But it was, the favor he met with in the lectures he

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went about delivering on elocution that led him to turn his attention to the compilation of a pronouncing dictionary. The result of his labors was not made known until some years after the appearance of Sheridan's similar work, but it had been prepared long before. As early as 1774 Walker published a quarto pamphlet dedicated to Garrick, outlining the general idea of a pronouncing dictionary on a plan entirely new. It further contained observations on several words which were pronounced differently. An advertisement accompanying it informed the reader that the proposed work was then ready for the press, would be comprised in two volumes, and would be delivered to subscribers at the price of a guinea and a half. But the appeal for subscriptions met with no adequate response. As a

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contemporary periodical observed, the plan was above both the comprehension and the pockets of the public. The two volumes dwindled into a single one, which came out the next year. In it the words followed one another according to their terminations. At a somewhat later period the work was entitled, what it really was, a Rhyming Dictionary. As such it has held its own from that time to the present day. It was not, however, until 1791 that the first edition appeared of the regular pronouncing dictionary, which formed the great labor of Walker's life.

Of all the eighteenth-century orthoepists Walker is entitled to much the most consideration. This is not due entirely to the fact that he became generally accepted as an authority, and in consequence of that acceptance extend-

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ed far and wide the usage he recommended. He is now of interest and importance because of the attitude he assumed towards pronunciation itself, and the light he threw upon the differences which then prevailed. He was not content with recording usage as he found it, or fancied that he had found it. He had views of his own as to the principles by which it should be governed. These he constantly reinforced by pointing out examples of their violation. He saw clearly and admitted fully that the correctest theoretical pronunciation could not hold its ground against the pronunciation of cultivated society, however contrary the latter might be to analogy. But while he recognized the binding power of the usage of the superior class, he reserved the right to protest against the rightfulness of the

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authority which he felt compelled to obey. When this polite usage varied, he pointed out which he deemed the better way, and strove to induce men to follow it. He entreated, he inveighed. His work is so full of comments upon different existing pronunciations that it must always be of peculiar value to any one interested in the history of orthoepy; and there will be constant occasion in the course of these pages to note his criticisms of others, to cite his statements about the then current usage, and occasionally to record his sorrows, for his subject was one he took very seriously. Walker, indeed, had but little of the special knowledge which is now deemed indispensable to the orthoepist. That was a deficiency which he shared with his contemporaries. But in his way he was a hard student of his subject,

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as well as a keen observer of the pronunciations prevalent in his day. There was ample reason, therefore, for the favor his work met with; and if men were disposed to submit to authority at all, his was certainly as satisfactory as any which presented itself.

Not that Walker's assertions and inferences are to be always received with the trusting faith we give to a divine revelation. In his comments upon what is and what ought to be, he was by no means free from the influence of the associations by which he had long been surrounded. He was sometimes ruled by theory which was altogether too refined for practice. He had a high philosophical way of justifying certain pronunciations, which is much more entertaining than it is convincing. *Fierce* and *pierce*, for instance, he made in his first

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work to ryme with *verse*. It was what Milton and others had done long before. But by the time his dictionary appeared, Walker became aware that this pronunciation, though still retained upon the stage, was not the pronunciation of polite society. It was in the following way he explained the discrepancy: "Actors," he wrote, "who have such continual occasion to express the passions, feel a propriety in giving a short vowel sound to a word denoting a rapid and violent emotion; and, therefore, though the pronunciation may be said to be grammatically improper, it is philosophically right." Much the same sort of explanation was given of *cheerful* and *fearful*, where the first syllable of each was permitted by him to be sounded as *cher* and *fer*. The refinements in which he occasionally indulged may be illus-

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trated by his account of the circumstances under which it is proper to sound the *g* of the ending *-ing*, and when not. This was then a subject of dispute and, as we are told, a cause of great embarrassment. Walker had his way of settling the difficulty, and he announced it in 1783 in a little work of his, then published, entitled 'Hints for Improvement in the Art of Reading.' According to it, two syllables ending in the same sound cannot properly follow each other. The repetition had a very bad effect upon the ear. Accordingly, when the verb itself ends in *-ing*, the *g* of the present participle must not be heard; when not so ending, it must be. In consequence, the present participles of *ring*, *sing*, and *swing* must be pronounced *ring-in*, *sing-in*, *swing-in*. On the other hand, in the participles of *pin*, *begin*,



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and *sin* the presence of the *g* should be distinctly manifested. If this rule were not observed, we should have in each case the "same disgusting repetition" of the same sound.

Walker, like his predecessor, was careful to give us his reasons for being accepted as an authority. He, too, according to his own account, had been the chosen companion of the best and the highest in the land. But he was far from approving of the pronunciation taught by Sheridan, also a representative of the most cultivated society. "The numerous instances," he wrote, "I have given of impropriety, inconsistency, and want of acquaintance with the analysis of the language sufficiently show how imperfect I think his dictionary is upon the whole." Walker, in fact, felt free to criticise any or all of

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his predecessors. Nares, already mentioned, had, in 1784, brought out a work on English orthoepy, though he is now known mainly by his glossary of Elizabethan words and phrases. Of him Walker declared that he "had on many occasions mistaken the best usage." With his own possession of that somewhat vague article he was supremely satisfied, and he was good enough to let us know how he came to secure it. In the advertisement to the later editions of his dictionary he informed us that he was born within a few miles of London, had lived there almost all his life, and had there also exercised himself in public speaking for many years. He was, in truth, profoundly impressed with his own opportunities and qualifications. "To such a person," he proudly remarked of himself, "if to any one, the

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true pronunciation of the language must be very familiar." The vernacular instinct, he went on to tell us, that was his own by right of birth, had been developed by constant study and by constant association with the best speakers.

Self-confidence of this sort is an effective auxiliary in most struggles; but in matters of usage it is more than half the battle. No small share of Walker's success in being received as an authority was due to his calm assertion that when it came to pronunciation he was the man, and on that subject wisdom would die with him. But the weary seeker after an unassailable standard was not permitted to escape from the distraction of conflicting authorities by reposing peacefully in Walker's arms. If that lexicographer found fault with

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Sheridan, there were those who found fault with him. Not to speak of others, Knowles, in 1835, brought out his pronouncing dictionary. On the title-page he proclaimed himself the father of the author of 'Virginius,' and also the nephew of Thomas Sheridan. It was to be expected that the nephew of his uncle should not speak too well of that uncle's depreciator. He asserted that where Sheridan had committed one error Walker had committed two. Censures from such a quarter might perhaps be attributed to hereditary hostility. That is a view, however, which cannot be taken of the criticism made by Smart, who, in 1836, brought out a revision of Walker's dictionary, "adapted," says the title-page, "to the present state of literature and science." In a preface to a later edition of this work,

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Smart loftily declared that the authors of previous dictionaries had, with few exceptions, been Irishmen or Scotchmen. No wonder that he felt outraged at the presumption which had attempted to override the disabilities of birth. Furthermore, he tells us, he had been informed that Walker himself was a Yorkshireman, and was confident that the information must be correct from certain pronunciations which he specified. "This Northern peculiarity," he added, "along with others of provincial origin, is unconsciously copied by provincial editors of subsequent dictionaries, who pay more deference to Walker's correctness of ear than my experience warrants me in conceding."

As Walker had taken particular pains to state that he was born near London, and had spent most of his life there, it

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was somewhat hard upon him to be disdainfully termed a Yorkshireman by his own reviser, and in addition to have the pure London pronunciation, upon which he had prided himself, stigmatized as provincial by another cockney. Smart, in his turn, did not neglect to disclose to us the foundation of his right to be deemed an authority. It was nothing but a variation of the same old tune. He was born and bred in the West End of London. From the outset of his career his attention had been turned to the subject of orthoepy. Early in life he had produced a work on that subject, entitled 'A Practical Grammar of English Pronunciation.' He had been employed as a teacher of elocution in the first families of the kingdom, not excepting the family of the highest person. He had lectured frequently before literary

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and scientific institutions in the metropolis, and during the same period had kept up a constant intercourse with men of letters. What more could be asked?

## II

THERE are two things that strike the attention of any one who makes a careful examination of dictionaries and of the orthoepy set forth by the men who prepare them. The first is that the pronunciation of a certain number of words is represented in them differently. The second is that the compilers of all of them assert their own infallibility or assume it. Each one of these has a serene confidence in the conclusions which he has reached. Each one is thoroughly convinced of his ability to act as a guide to others. The early compilers, as we have seen, made the mistake of giving the reasons upon which



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their faith in themselves was founded. They assured us that they had spent their lives wholly or in part in a region where the pure article of pronunciation was supposed to be held in keeping by the nobility of rank and of intellect. To them, accordingly, had been vouchsafed the very best opportunities for securing this inestimable jewel. They had been in the habit of giving instruction in families that belonged to the highest circles. They had associated familiarly with the most distinguished men of science and letters. It is, therefore, naturally annoying to the seeker after positive truth to find these intimate friends of scholars and statesmen disagreeing among themselves—in fact, manifesting at times a thinly veiled contempt for the opinions of their rivals, and implying that the society in which these had learned their

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way of pronouncing was no better than it should be.

It is more than annoying; it is discouraging. For their differences are sometimes very marked. From the outset there has inevitably been the everlasting contest between the sticklers for abstract propriety and the advocates of what has become the general practice. This contention has ended sometimes in the success of the one party, sometimes in that of the other. In *colonel* we have seen the triumph of the latter. We can offset it, however, by the triumph of the former in *China*. *Lilac* may also be added. In polite society this word was once frequently pronounced as if written *laylock*, and indeed it was sometimes so printed. Though common, it appears to have never been the exclusive pronunciation, and has now become dialectic or

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provincial. But the success of abstract propriety will perhaps seem most striking to many in the case of the words *cucumber* and *asparagus*. In each of these two it has taken practically a century to establish the present usage. Sheridan knows no such pronunciation as *cowcumber*, and while he inserts *sparrow-grass*, he merely says of it that it is "corrupted from asparagus." But Walker manfully recognized the actual situation. He observes regretfully of *cucumber* that "it seems too firmly fixed in the sound of *cowcumber* to be altered." He admits, as did Johnson and others, that *asparagus* is the theoretically correct form; but he adds that "the corruption of the word into *sparrow-grass* is so general that *asparagus* has an air of stiffness and pedantry."

Walker, indeed, regarded the culinary

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art as a prolific source of orthoepic evil. He remarked of *frumenty* that it was almost universally corrupted into *furmenty* and sometimes into *furmete*. "I believe," he added, dejectedly, "it is seldom found that words employed in the concerns of cookery are ever recovered from irregularity." There was some justification for the view, though but little for the despondency he manifested about it. We learn from a treatise of the lexicographer Bailey, published in 1726, that a then common and an apparently fully authorized pronunciation of *onion* was *innian*. This has lasted down to the present day; but long before Walker's time it had fallen, save in Ireland, from its high estate. Even he himself is found exulting in the prospective triumph of *saw* over *sas* as the representative of the first

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syllable of *sausage*. The correct, he told us, pronounced the word *saw'sidge*; the vulgar *sas'sidge*. Yet he had to admit that in the latter class were included Sheridan and some other orthoepists; nor in this instance did he feel so sure of the prevalence or superiority of his own usage as to venture to exclude absolutely the other.

It must not be overlooked, however, that for some of these apparently irregular pronunciations there was at one time full justification in the orthography. Notably was this true of *cucumber*. The pronunciation *cowcumber* was not a corruption. During a considerable period of time that was not only the prevalent but a legitimate spelling of the word. When Mr. Pepys tells us in his Diary<sup>1</sup> that a certain gen-

<sup>1</sup> August 22, 1663.

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tleman was "dead of eating cowcumbers," he was conforming in his orthography to the practice of his age. We may pardon him even another spelling of the same sort on the ground of its doubtless exact representation of his pronunciation. "Thence to the Grayhound in Fleet Street," he wrote, "and there drank some raspberry sack and eat some *sasages*, and so home very merry."<sup>1</sup> But the case is different with *sparrow-grass*. The way had been made open for this form by the frequent and probably general dropping, both in speaking and writing, of the initial *a* of the word from which it was corrupted. *Sparagus* was common in print, and undoubtedly much more so in conversation. The transition from it to *sparrow-grass* was easy. The latter, accordingly, was an attempt

<sup>1</sup> November 12, 1661.

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on the part of popular etymology to attach a sort of sense to a strange word it could not easily comprehend.

But neither in this case nor in that of *cucumber* did these pronunciations die out easily or early from the practice of polite society. The change was gradual. No well-taught person, Smart declared, in 1836, in the preface to his revision of Walker, would any longer say *cowcumber* or *sparrow-grass*, although any other pronunciation of *cucumber* and *asparagus* would have been pedantic thirty years before. In 1835 Knowles, too, had felt called on to denounce *cowcumber*, which he mentions as still the vulgar pronunciation of *cucumber*. It is a natural inference, however, from his further comment, that though he said vulgar, it was the word vulgar in its original and not in its derived sense

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which he had in mind. "Neither fashion nor general custom," he added, "ought to sanction the gross corruption of this word." In fact, any pronunciation once widely prevalent gives up the ghost reluctantly. In some quarters *cucumber* can doubtless still be heard. *Sparrow-grass* has gone, it is true, from the speech of the educated; but it is still no uncommon thing to hear in grocers' shops *asparagus* simply designated as *grass*.

This survival of ancient usage explains the existence among the uneducated of many pronunciations which, at a former period, were regularly employed by the educated. The language of the illiterate is, to a great extent, archaic. It retains words and meanings and grammatical constructions which were once in the best of use, but have ceased



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to be used by the best. This is as true of pronunciation as it is of vocabulary and grammar. In this respect the archaic nature of the speech of the uneducated manifests itself in practices which would be little expected to exist. It sometimes affects the place of the accent. In our tongue it is generally popular usage which is disposed to lay the stress upon a syllable far from the end of the word. It is against this tendency that sticklers for the observance of the Latin or Greek quantity have fought, as we shall see later, most stubbornly. Yet, curiously enough, this practice, based upon classical authority, lingers sometimes in the mouths of the uncultivated long after it has been abandoned by the cultivated. Readers of Milton are well aware that with him *blasphemous* is invariably pronounced *blasphe'*

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*mous*. It was probably the general usage of the educated men of his time. No one now pronounces it so save the unlettered. They remain faithful to the classical quantity, and are treated with contumely for it by such as deem it both their right and duty to be horrified by hearing *illustrate* pronounced as *ill'ustrate*. Similar observations may be made of *contrary* and *mischievous*. *Character* also had once, perhaps universally, the accent on the penult. This practice was given up at last, but not till after usage had long wavered between placing the stress on the first or the second syllable. Yet in Ireland the penultimate accent continued with the educated to the middle of the eighteenth century at least; and with the uneducated it continues to the present day. 'The History of Sir Charles Grandison'

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appeared in 1754. In it Richardson introduces a certain Captain Salmonet, who, he tells us, spoke English as a Frenchman, "but pronounced the word *character* as an Irishman."

It is not, however, the accentuation which best exemplifies the survival in the speech of the uneducated of what was once the usage of the educated. That is better seen in the pronunciation of the vowels. According to the few orthoepic guides which have come down from the late seventeenth century and the early eighteenth, the termination *-ture* must have had then pretty generally the sound now indicated by *-ter*. We can still hear it at the present day, and, furthermore, see it represented in the words spelled as *nater* and *pictor* and *critter*. In certain instances these usages seem to have held out long in good society.

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Walker felt called upon to denounce what he termed a vulgar pronunciation of *nature*. This he gave as *na-ter*. Such a practice, he observed, could not be too carefully avoided. But, clearly, no such caution against its use would have been introduced into his dictionary had not this so-called vulgar pronunciation been frequently heard from the lips of persons who could not be deemed vulgar. Nor is there any particular need of our assuming to ourselves a special superiority in this matter over our fathers. Of the two pronunciations of *figure* authorized in most dictionaries, that which gives the final syllable the sound indicated by *ur* or *er* is the one to which, perhaps, on the whole, the weight of authority inclines. But the two ways have long existed, and both have had their advocates. Walker noted the dif-

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ference in his day. "There is," he said, "a coarse and a delicate pronunciation of this word and its compounds." The coarse he represented by *figgur*, the delicate by *fig-yure*. His adjectives show clearly where his preferences lay; indeed, it was only this delicate pronunciation, as he termed it, which he sanctioned. Yet his authority was insufficient to establish the universality of the practice he approved; and though the fuller pronunciation is likely in time to drive out the other, it will have a long struggle before it succeeds.

An interesting illustration of these survivals which is still retained in polite usage is seen in the word *clerk*. It is not until very lately that an English dictionary, as distinguished from an American, has recognized any other pronunciation of it than *clark*. Yet we are

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told by the most recent authority on the subject that *clürk*, as regularly heard in the United States, has of late "become somewhat frequent in London and its neighborhood."<sup>1</sup> Such a pronunciation was sure to come, whether it had previously existed in the United States or not. *Clerk* is simply following the course that has already been taken by no small number of words which have the combination of the letters *e* and *r*. Down to the latter part of the eighteenth century *merchant* was ordinarily pronounced as if it were spelled *marchant*. So Sheridan gave it in his dictionary. For thus doing he was taken to task by brother orthoepists, who denounced him as having sanctioned a sound of *e*

<sup>1</sup> 'New Historical Dictionary,' under *clerk*. The representation of its pronunciation by *clürk* is my own.

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which had become vulgar and was heard only among the lower order of people. Here, as in general, the uneducated clung to the usage which had died out among the educated. The former, indeed, still continue to give at times to *certain* and *service* and *servant* and *sermon* and *serpent* the pronunciation *sartin* and *sarvice* and *sarvant* and *sarmon* and *sarpent*. Perhaps it was the analogy of this last word which led them, further, to add a *t* to *vermin* and call it *varmint*.

The custom of giving the sound of *a* to the *e* of these words did not die out rapidly. As late as his own day Walker had to admit that "even among the better sort we sometimes hear the salutation, *Sir, your sarvant!* though this pronunciation of the word singly would be looked upon as a mark of the lowest vul-

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garity." *Clargy* as the pronunciation of *clergy* has scarcely been heard since the seventeenth century, and *clerk* will, in course of time, inevitably partake of its fortunes. *Serjeant* and it, and a few names of places, are now the only ones which hold out against the general tendency, but they are not likely to hold out forever. *Jersey* was once pronounced *Jarsey* occasionally, if not regularly. It is doubtful if *Hertford* and *Derby* can withstand permanently the ortho-epic pressure which is steadily directed, though without conscious intention, against the sound of *ar* in these words. At the same time, it is to be kept in mind that in changing the sound we are not conforming to the orthography. We are simply going from one kind of mispronunciation to another. In *clerical* we have the genuine sound of *e*; but we



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do not have it in *clergy* or *clerk*, whether we pronounce these words according to the one method or the other.

But the most widespread and still the most noticeable of these survivals is that which gives to the digraph *oi* the diphthongal sound of *i*. At the present day, when we set out to represent illiterate pronunciation of certain common words, we write *bile* for *boil*, *brile* for *broil*, *jine* for *join*, *ile* for *oil*, *pint* for *point*, *pison* for *poison*, *spile* for *spoil*. There was a time when, in most and perhaps in all of these words, as well as in some others, the sound denoted by the spelling with *i* indicated the usage of the educated. The practice threatened to extend itself to every word in which *oi* appeared. In the famous triplet of Pope we see it fully exemplified:

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“ Waller was smooth; but Dryden taught to  
    join  
    The varying verse, the full resounding line,  
    The long majestic march, and energy divine.”

Here we see *join* ryming to *line* and *divine*. That *jine* was Pope's regular way of pronouncing the verb there can be no doubt. It is further perfectly fair to assume that in so doing he followed the common cultivated practice of his time. The concordance to his works—excluding the Homeric translations—shows that *join* occurs in them at the end of a verse just fourteen times. The words with which it rymes are *design*, *dine*, *divine*, *line*, *mine*, *nine*, *Proserpine*, *shine*, *thine*, and *vine*. In a similar way the past tense *joined* rymes with *find*, *mankind*, *mind*, and *refined*, and likewise *joins* with *mines*. This must be deemed conclusive as to the pronuncia-

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tion accepted generally, if not universally, in the circle in which moved the greatest of the then living English men of letters. Moreover, in the only instance in which Pope used the past tense of *spoiled* as the final word of a line it rhymed with *wild*.

But we need not go to the poets to infer what must have been the facts. Plenty of direct evidence on this point is furnished by the orthoepists themselves. During the latter part of the eighteenth century they were much disturbed by the common practice of pronouncing *oi* as *i*. Would it become universal? Fears were entertained and expressed that its proper sound would disappear from the speech. Kenrick deplored the fact that certain words had lost it almost entirely. "Such," said he, "are *boil*, *join*, and many others, which

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it would now appear affected to pronounce otherwise than *bile* and *jine*." This statement was made in 1773. About half a score of years later hope for the orthoepic future of these words began to revive. It still required courage, indeed, to give to *oi* its proper sound; but courage was sometimes not lacking. "The banished diphthong," wrote Nares, "seems at length to be upon its return; for there are many who are now hardy enough to pronounce *boil* exactly as they do *toil*, *join* like *coin*, etc."<sup>1</sup> Nares seems to have been unaware that his very comparisons proved the pronunciation he favored had been making continuous progress for more than a hundred years. Earlier in the century Bailey represented the pronunciation of *coin* by *quine*. The following couplet of Dry-

<sup>1</sup> 'Elements of Orthoepy,' p. 74.

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den shows what was his pronunciation of *toil*:

"While he, withdrawn, at their mad labor  
smiles,  
And safe enjoys the Sabbath of his toils." <sup>1</sup>

There was, clearly, difference of usage, however, even at this later period, about this last word. But a little while before Nares had cited its diphthong as one correctly sounded, Kenrick had observed that *oil* and *toil* were frequently pronounced like *isle* and *tile*. The former orthoepist asserted, indeed, that the only real objection to giving the true sound to *oi* in *join* was that "it is so constantly rhymed to *fine*, *line*, and the like by our best poets." <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'Absalom and Achitophel,' part i., line 912 (1681).

<sup>2</sup> 'Elements of Orthoepy,' p. 74, note.

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There was really no ground for the anxiety which orthoepists then entertained about the possible disappearance of the *oi*. The diphthong had been for a long time steadily regaining its rights. By the end of the century Walker felt justified in bestowing upon the once common pronunciation the epithet vulgar. This is the adjective which orthoepists most affect when they wish to denounce any practice to which they take exception. Walker resorted to it frequently, and the revolution in usage had apparently now become so rapid that he could venture to do so in safety in the case of this diphthong. He referred to the habit of sounding *oi* as *i* as being still prevalent among the vulgar. Whether the implied imputation was true then or not, it has become so now. At the present time cultivated speech

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preserves this relic of past usage only in *choir*. Even here the exception is due to the fact that there had long existed, as there still exists, another spelling, *quire*. This is the representative of the various forms which the word has had from its first introduction into the language. That took place near the end of the thirteenth century. These forms carried with them then their own pronunciation. The spelling *choir* is not found till the latter part of the seventeenth century. For a good while after it was little used in literature as distinct from technical works. Its late appearance, and its comparatively infrequent employment for the time immediately following its appearance, prevented it from affecting the sound of the diphthong.

These examples, if they teach nothing else, suggest the possibility that pro-

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nunciations which are now looked upon by many as tests of good breeding and culture may come in time to be reckoned vulgar. Especially will this be the case if in any way they violate the analogies of the language. It is usually their anomalous character which constitutes their chief recommendation in the eyes of those who assume for themselves peculiar excellence in the purity of their utterance. It is this same anomalous character which threatens the permanence of the cherished pronunciation. Yet it is not the conflict which goes on between what he calls the common and what he considers the proper usage which alone vexes the soul of the orthoepist. With variations already existing, and others steadily coming to exist, he finds himself in constant perplexity. In a language which has more than



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forty sounds to be represented, and with but a few more than twenty characters to represent them, pronunciation is always liable to partake of a certain degree of lawlessness. This is true in particular of the vowel system. There caprice and fashion have the opportunity to do their perfect work. The changes which take place in consequence are rarely the result of any principle, or of any recognizable orthoepic influence. To the ordinary observer they seem nothing more than the blind results of chance. Yet to struggle against them is usually of little avail. Orthoepists may resort to entreaty or invective, but in spite of their utmost efforts they are often compelled to acquiesce in pronunciations which are abhorrent to their souls.

As this particular field is practically

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limitless, all that can be done here is to give a slight glimpse of its nature by pointing out one or two instances of the conflict which at times has gone on between the vowel pronunciation found in literature and that adopted by polite society. In such cases, literature, as a general rule, gets distinctly the worst of it. Two interesting examples are *wound* and *wind*. From the outset lexicographers have protested against giving to the *ou* of the former word the sound of *oo*, as heard, for illustration, in *swoon*. They have pointed out that in our classic poetry the word invariably rhymes with such words as *sound*, *found*, and *ground*. Their protests have been of but little avail. Most of them continue, indeed, to authorize the old, historic pronunciation, and some of them to denounce the fashionable one; but they have to admit that

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the spoken language has been too much for the literary. Even more decided has been the triumph of *wind* over *wind*. The latter pronunciation is, or at least was, the only one known to English rhyme. Were it now heard in conversation, the listener would be struck with surprise, and, in some instances, it is to be feared, would be troubled with lack of comprehension. Yet against this perversion of pronunciation, as they regarded it, which gives the short sound to *i* in this word, the orthoepists of the eighteenth century fought persistently and sturdily. It was a corruption which filled the soul of Swift with peculiar disgust. The person employing it in his presence was apt to bring down upon himself the great Dean's most contemptuous sarcasm. "I have a great *mînd* to *fînd* why you pronounce it

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*wind*," he would say to the offender. Neither his ridicule nor the learned objections of others had the slightest effect upon the fortunes of the word.

Full as striking an illustration of this indifference to orthoepic sanctions may be seen going on before our own eyes. It is exhibited in the case of *either* and *neither*. Of both these words it is to be said that, as far back as we can trace the pronunciation, the weight of usage as well as of authority is distinctly in favor of giving to the *ei* the sound we call long *e*. There is a reason for this preference. Nearly all the words in our language that contain this digraph have either the sound heard in *vein* or that in *seize*. The only two common ones in our tongue, so far as I can recall, in which the pronunciation represented by the diphthongal *i* appears are *height* and

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*sleight*; and these were sometimes written also with the simple *i* as well as *ei*. Early in the eighteenth century, however, we find the *i* sound recorded as used by some in the first syllable of *either* and *neither*. It had doubtless prevailed to a certain extent in the seventeenth century. But it seems to have existed then, and for a long time after, rather on sufferance, to be treated as something permissible but not commendable. When pronouncing dictionaries came into vogue in the latter half of the eighteenth century, this pronunciation was generally looked at askance by their compilers. Buchanan and Johnston were the only two, as far as I can discover, who declared unreservedly in its favor. Both of these men, however, were Scotchmen, and their opinions carried little weight. On the other hand,

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the rest of the orthoepists, with Sheridan and Walker at their head, either recognized exclusively the sound of *ē* in the first syllable of these words or gave it distinctly the preference. This attitude may be said to have been generally continued by their successors down to the present time. Still the hostility of the most widely accepted authorities has failed to retard the progress of the *ī* pronunciation in these words. In spite of its defiance of analogy, it has steadily gained ground. It is perhaps now more prevalent than the other; at least it is full as prevalent. Fashion has either favored it or has been supposed to favor it. All of us are privileged in these latter days frequently to witness painful struggles put forth to give to the first syllable of these words the sound of *ī*. By those who have been brought up to give

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it the sound of *ē*. There is apparently an impression on the part of some that such a pronunciation establishes on a firm foundation an otherwise doubtful social standing.

If, however, the pronunciation favored by literature has met with reverse in the case of *wind* and *wound*, it has scored a distinct triumph in *gold*. This in poetry always rymes with such words as *old*, *fold*, *behold*. So it does now in conversation. But in the latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the fashionable and, withal, the more frequent pronunciation was *gould*. It was a practice which brought grief to the heart of Walker. He looked upon it as a disgrace to the language that indolence and vulgarity had thus been enabled to corrupt it into the sound it then had. Still he

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deemed it too firmly intrenched ever to disappear. Forecasts of this sort are a mere waste of breath. No one can predict, with any approach to certainty of fulfilment, how long a particular pronunciation of a particular word is likely to last. If from any cause it comes to offend the orthoepic sense of large numbers, it is destined to go, even though literature and fashion have combined to uphold its authority. In the tragedy of 'Julius Cæsar' Cassius is represented as saying:

"Now is it Rome indeed and room enough,  
When there is in it but one only man."

Shakespeare's play upon the word is evidence that in his age the pronunciation of the city's name was, at least at times, that denoted by the noun with which it is here joined in the quotation,



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and not as now by that of the verb *roam*. There is testimony from other quarters that such was the practice generally. The rymes of poets, the direct statements found in text-books, show that the pronunciation indicated in the lines just given was the one prevailing during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. At the end of the latter period, Walker declared that the *o* of *Rome* seemed irrecoverably fixed in the sound heard in *move*. He did not speak of it with disapproval. No special clamor, indeed, seems ever to have been raised against the pronunciation. Yet by the latter half of the nineteenth century, if not earlier, it had disappeared.

There was nothing peculiar in the state of mind exhibited by Swift about *wind* or by Walker about *gold*. It is what we all display, with more or less

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reason, when we hear a pronunciation which is offensive to us. To him who has been brought up to sound a vowel in a particular way, any other way is pretty sure to seem either the mark of absurd affectation or intolerable vulgarity. These are the terms which we apply to pronunciations which vary from those prevailing in the charmed circle to which we, of course, belong. When we hear men indulging in such, we are led to look with suspicion upon any pretensions they make to the possession of that refinement and culture which characterize us. Examples can be found on every side; but in order not to be invidious, let us go back a century or so. Lord Chesterfield, in writing to his son, pointed out one of the means by which the vulgarity of a man, no matter what his position, could be detected. It was by

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his pronunciation. In that he bore upon him the marks of the beast. The vulgar man would say, for illustration, going *to-wards* such and such a place, instead of *towards*.<sup>1</sup> It is not perfectly clear what pronunciation it was that Chesterfield approved; but it seems probable that he objected to putting the stress upon the final syllable. This, it may be remarked in passing, was the one authorized a few years after by Dr. Johnson in his dictionary. *Towards*, indeed, during the whole of the eighteenth century, seems to have been the cause of much orthoepic contention. Some placed the accent upon the first syllable; some upon the last; some crushed the two syllables into one.

Another of Chesterfield's tests of vulgarity he found in the word *oblige*.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of September 27, 1749.

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Specially objectionable was the sound of its *i* as *ē*, which, in the illustration he gave of it, he represented by *ei*. The vulgar man, he tells us, "is *obleiged*, not *obliged*, to you." The despised pronunciation was one which had once been heard regularly. The stock quotation, illustrating the practice, is contained in the couplet forming a part of Pope's famous attack upon Addison:

"Dreading even fools, by flatterers besieg'd,  
And so obliging that he ne'er oblig'd."

But in 1749, the year in which Chesterfield was writing, this more ancient way of pronouncing the word was beginning to be looked upon by some with much disfavor. Among these the noble lord was manifestly included. During the latter half of the eighteenth century more difference prevailed, perhaps, in

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regard to this word than about *towards*. Some pronounced it the one way, some the other; there were a few who authorized both. The original pronunciation held its ground for a long while. In 1784 Nares gave a list of words in which, according to him, "*i* had the sound of long *e*." Among them this particular one was included. "*Oblige* still, I think, retains it," he said, hesitatingly, "notwithstanding the proscription of that pronunciation by the late Lord Chesterfield." Even Walker, opposed to it on what he called principle, put it down in his dictionary as an allowable usage. But the feeling had then been for a long while gradually growing, that though this pronunciation might not be improper, it was distinctly old-fashioned. As soon as that attitude towards it became wide-spread, its entire disappearance was

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only a question of time. George IV., when Prince of Wales, used to relate, with a good deal of glee, the grave rebuke administered to him by John Kemble for giving to the *i* of this word the objectionable sound. "It would become your royal mouth much better," said the stately actor, "to pronounce the word *oblige*, and not *oblēge*."

The fundamental principle, indeed, upon which we base our orthoepical criticisms is that any pronunciation we do not ourselves employ, or at least tolerate, is essentially wrong. Naturally, we reprobate those coming into use to which we are not accustomed, as also those going out of it, which, in spite of our disapproval, still show a lingering life. This feeling, so generally prevalent among cultivated speakers, may not indicate much knowledge of the facts

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on their part, or much appreciation of the situation; but, nevertheless, it is far from being an unmixed evil. In spite of the ignorant pretentiousness with which it is often accompanied, it may be deemed, in truth, a positive benefit. Changes must inevitably take place in pronunciation. In consequence, however, of the disfavor and opposition they meet, they take place slowly. This is something in itself desirable. Furthermore, as a result of the dislike, reasonable or unreasonable, which large numbers are sure to manifest for a new pronunciation, these changes are not apt to go very far. Some of them are, of course, certain to override the prejudices of the hostile and establish themselves in general usage. The caprice of fashion plays, as we have seen, no small part in determining the status of a lim-

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ited number. But in addition there are certain influences always at work which tend to produce diversity. Two of them require special consideration, both for what they have done and are still doing in the way of bringing about change. They are important because they act not so much upon individual words as upon whole classes. They are, further, operating at all times and in all places.

The first concerns the shifting of the accent. With us a general disposition exists—subject to numerous exceptions—to place it as far from the end as possible. The practice is occasionally carried to such an extreme that it almost requires a training in vocal gymnastics to utter the word without giving the impression that part of it has been swallowed by the speaker. Excesses of this



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sort are apt, in the long run, to cure themselves; for pronunciation, like everything else, tends to follow the line of least resistance. When the accent is thrown back to the fourth syllable from the end, with no secondary accent to aid utterance—as, for instance, in the case of *indisputable* and *inexplicable*—we may be confident that men of independence who find the word difficult to pronounce will take it upon them to pronounce it to suit themselves. It is then merely a matter of chance whether the method they have chosen to adopt has the fortune to be sanctioned by some one of the numerous dictionaries. In the case of the two words just cited, *indisputable* has, if anything, the greater weight of published authority in favor of placing the accent on the third syllable; while in the case of the more dif-

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ficult word, *inexplicable*, there is no orthoepic authority at all for such a course outside of the practice of individuals.

In words of four syllables the conflict has usually been on the lines just indicated. Shall the stress rest upon the second syllable? Or upon the first, with generally, though not invariably, a secondary stress upon the third, or the reverse? *Advertisement* is a good illustration. The place of the accent has been in the instance of this word a fruitful source of controversy for a hundred and fifty years at least, and is likely so to remain. On the other hand, *detestable*, which Shakespeare invariably stressed upon the first syllable, has now the stress upon the second. At the present day differences upon the points just indicated involve about fifty words. If we

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should go back to the eighteenth century the list would have to be considerably enlarged. We may select two of them as illustrative of the variation of view which has prevailed at different times and with different orthoepists. In the case of one of these uniformity has now come to prevail; in that of the other there still remains diversity. *Academy* had once the accent on the first syllable. For a long period this usage continued to exist. By the middle, at least, of the eighteenth century the disposition to give the word its present pronunciation began to manifest itself—"Anciently and properly," remarked Dr. Johnson, "with the accent on the first syllable." He cited as an example the line from 'Love's Labor's Lost,'

"Our court shall be a little academy,"

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where, however, the word in the original is *academe*.<sup>1</sup> But he added the observation that the accent was, in his time, frequently heard upon the second syllable. His implied condemnation of the practice did not arrest the progress of the new pronunciation. By the end of the century it had fully established itself, and in the century which followed it became, what it is now, the exclusive usage.

The other word is *corollary*. Here Johnson placed, without comment, the accent on the first syllable, as if there were no question whatever about the practice. Yet his predecessor, Bailey, had put it upon the second. Johnson cited again from Shakespeare an illustration, which exemplified one of the meanings of the word and also its pro-

<sup>1</sup> Achademe (folio of 1623), act i., scene 1.

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nunciation. It was the passage in 'The Tempest' where Prospero gives to Ariel the following command:

"Bring a corollary,  
Rather than want a spirit."<sup>1</sup>

From the great lexicographer's day to our own orthoepists have been divided in their treatment of this word. The weight of numbers, both in England and America, is distinctly in favor of the pronunciation he sanctioned. Most of the compilers of dictionaries have not even recognized the existence of any accentuation besides the one adopted by him, though there could hardly have been a time in which the other was not somewhere in good use. The orthoepists who have placed the accent on the second syllable have been, however,

<sup>1</sup> Act iv., scene 1.

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more considerate. They give Johnson's pronunciation as an alternative. Statements not very different may be made of a number of words in this same class. If, further, we turn our attention to words of more than four syllables, we shall find essentially the same agencies at work to produce diversity.

It is in the case of words of three syllables, however, that the contest has assumed special bitterness. In these the question at issue is whether the accent should rest upon the penultimate syllable or the antepenultimate. The peace of families has been disturbed, and neighbor has risen up against neighbor, in consequence of the difference of views held as to the proper pronunciation of such words as *aspirant*, *contemplate*, *demonstrate*, *extirpate*, *inundate*, *plethoric*, and others too numerous to mention.

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Upon them the stress swings backward and forward, from penult to antepenult, and the reverse, according to difference of time or place or person. In every generation the controversy crops up. Disagreement existed in the sixteenth century, as it did in the nineteenth; it is likely to exist in the twenty-fifth. Men will continue to show by irrefragable proofs, as they have heretofore shown, just where the accent ought to lie in all such words. They will be duly shocked in the future, as they have been in the past, by the imbecility which fails to recognize the justice of their contention or the perversity which refuses to conform to the practice they enjoin. In the Elizabethan period Shakespeare said, indifferently, *con'fiscate* or *confisc'ate*, *dem'onstrate* or *demon'strate*, but *con'template* alone. In the nineteenth century

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Rogers was made indignant by a usage corresponding to the first of the two practices here indicated. "The now fashionable pronunciation of several words," the old poet complained, "is to me at least offensive. *Con'template* is bad enough, but *bal'cony* makes me sick." At the present time it would produce a similar nauseating effect upon many to hear the accent fall upon the second syllable of this last word, as was once the usual practice.

It is only a few of these words which have excited much feeling, but the smallness of the number has been compensated by the acrimony displayed. The principal reason for this condition of things it is not difficult to discover. It is the ever-recurring contest between Teutonic accentuation and classical quantity. In any given period the par-



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particular pronunciations in vogue represent a compromise temporarily patched up in the course of the irrepressible conflict which goes on between these two. Certain words are unreservedly relinquished for a time to one party; certain to the other; a few are left to be struggled over. Those about which controversy continues to rage have almost invariably come from the Latin or the Greek. Their introduction into the language is due in the first instance to scholars. Coming under such auspices, it is natural that where the penult is long in the original tongue, it should receive the accent in English. It is safe to say that this is invariably the case at the outset. If, further, the employment of the word is limited mainly to the speech of the highly educated, it is reasonably certain to retain the pronunciation it had on its first entrance

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into the tongue. But if it once come into extensive use, the influences which affect the general practice soon begin to operate. The tendency speedily manifests itself to disregard the classical quantity. Of that the vast majority of those who employ the word know nothing; for it many of those who know care nothing. Consequently, the accent is thrown back by the members of these two classes from the penult to the antepenult. Between the scholarly usage remaining faithful to the original quantity and the popular usage, which aims to conform the pronunciation to English analogies, a conflict inevitably arises.

Furthermore, the agreement reached in any particular case has no assurance of permanence, for it is based upon no principle. It is nothing more than a

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convention. In one instance men pronounce a word so as to give recognition to the Latin quantity; in another instance of a precisely similar character they disregard it and follow English analogy. Accordingly, no settlement is lasting. It is liable at any moment to be upset by innovation or caprice or the authority of great example. The war is then at once renewed. The contest is far from being unequal. The classical guild has always been, as indeed it ought to be, a powerful one. However much shorn of its strength in these later times, it can still endure, in pugilistic phrase, an immense amount of punishment without showing any signs of giving in. Its members, as is natural, contend steadily for the pronunciation which pays respect to the quantity of the syllables as found in the original.

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They are very apt to impart a distinct tone of earnestness to the expression of their convictions by applying to those following the contrary practice certain opprobrious epithets of which "illiterate" is the least offensive. By many of them the classical quantity is regarded as something altogether too sacred to be trifled with. They write letters to the press deploring the lamentable tendency which has always existed, and still exists, to throw back the accent from the end of the word. They seem to be unaware of the fact that this is about the same as deploring that the English language is the English language.

But there is no doubt that their contention always has had, and is always likely to have, a good deal of influence upon usage. Furthermore, they not

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only recommend by their practice the pronunciations they approve; they have to no small extent the means of having their preferences respected. It is to the men who have received classical training that the compilation of dictionaries is mainly committed. Even those of them who are abstractly disposed to pay little heed to the original quantity are, nevertheless, affected by the education they have had. It has given them the chance to acquire prejudices of the kind just indicated. Those of the number who have improved fully the opportunities thus furnished frequently manifest a disposition in the orthoepey they sanction in these dictionaries to go back on the least pretext to the pronunciations which correspond to the classical quantity. Even such of them as profess indifference in the matter are slow to rec-

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ognize changes which have taken place in favor of the English accentuation. *Inundate* is a case in point. For very many years past the accent has been placed by a large body of cultivated men upon the first syllable. Yet the majority of modern dictionaries will be searched in vain for any authorization of this usage, though heard constantly. In two great American ones—the International and the Standard—not even is its existence recognized. The same statement can be made of two English ones—the Encyclopædic and Stormonth's. The only three leading works of this character which authorize it are the Century, the Imperial, and the New Historical English Dictionary.

This deference to classical quantity makes often a singular exhibition of itself. We are told in Mr. Trevelyan's

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fascinating biography that Macaulay, in correcting errors, real or assumed, committed by his nephews and nieces, censured, above all, any disposition on their part to pronounce the penult of *metamorphosis* short. This has more than the interest of an example of the question under discussion. It is like a reversion to the old days, when every man was his own orthoepist. It illustrates peculiarly the independence often shown by Englishmen of all generally recognized authority in the matter of pronunciation, and their confidence in the correctness of their practice, for the reason, amply sufficient to them, that it is their practice. The American usually goes to his favorite dictionary, and meekly accepts, without even thinking of protest, what the man he has adopted as his guide chooses to tell him. In this particular case it is

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first to be stated that most of the words ending in *-osis* are purely technical. Used only by special students, they naturally retain the accentuation which is based upon the quantity of the primitive. Two of this class, however—*metamorphosis* and *apotheosis*—have escaped into the language of general literature. In the instance of the former, the orthoepists of the eighteenth century, including the principal lexicographers—Bailey, Dr. Johnson, Sheridan, and Walker—agreed in placing the accent on the antepenult. So also have done the orthoepists of the nineteenth century. Not one of them, so far as I can discover, recognizes even the existence of the pronunciation insisted upon by Macaulay as the only one which could properly be used.

*Apotheosis* has had a career somewhat



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more checkered; still its history resembles, in general, that of *metamorphosis*. In its case also nearly all the orthoepists of the eighteenth century put the accent upon the antepenult. There were two or three exceptions; but none of these were men who had a great following. The same state of things continued largely during most of the nineteenth century. The weight of authority still remained distinctly in favor of the antepenultimate accent. But as we approach nearer our own time the attitude exhibited towards the pronunciation of the word has undergone an apparent change. There seems to have arisen a disposition to lay the stress upon the penult. "Seems to have arisen" is the language used. When any one tells us that most persons pronounce a word so and so, it is always a pertinent inquiry

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to make, how he came to know what most persons do. Especially is the question necessary when the pronunciation which is represented as meeting with the approbation of the great majority is one not sanctioned by the majority of orthoepists. How extensive, accordingly, is the observation upon which the assertion is based? How many persons have been consulted? It will ordinarily be found that the informant has endowed his own practice and that of his immediate circle with the attribute of generality, if not of universality. Still, there is not much question that the accentuation of the penult of *apotheosis* has made great headway of late years. It is authorized by several modern dictionaries. It is not unlikely that it may come to prevail generally; not impossible that it may come to prevail exclu-

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sively. The men by whom the word is almost entirely used are specially susceptible to classical influences. In the light of the facts which have just been given there is even hope that Macaulay's accentuation of *metamorphosis*, scouted from the beginning as it has been by orthoepists, may yet find favor.

The feeling exhibited about the pronunciation of such words is best illustrated by Landor in one of his 'Imaginary Conversations.' It is that which is set forth as having taken place between Dr. Johnson and Horne Tooke. The latter is represented as saying that in some instances we have lost the right accent. "In my youth," he continues, "he would have been ridiculed who placed it upon the first syllable of *confiscated*, *contemplative*, *conventicle*, at which the ear revolts: in many other

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compounds we thrust it back with equal precipitancy and rudeness. We have sinned, and are sinning, against our fathers and mothers. We shall 're'pent' and 're'form' and 're'monstrate'; and be 're'jected' at last." This extract fully and fairly presents the attitude taken by those who may be called the classicists. Here we see the belief in full flower, that there is a right accent belonging to derived English words, and this accent is based upon respect for the Latin quantity. Such a belief implies ignorance of the influences which have affected and still affect pronunciation in our tongue. To its supporters that seems all the more reason for holding it firmly and expressing it vigorously. "I have lately heard *ill'ustrate*," Horne Tooke is further reported as remarking in this imaginary conversation. "We

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shall presently come to *imper'ceptible*."

Landor was unaware that his anticipated *imper'ceptible* was opposed to the analogy of the language, and that in consequence it belonged to a kind of pronunciation which the users of speech were disposed to turn away from instead of turning to. The exact reverse was true in the case of the other word. Had he himself lived two or three years longer than he actually did, he could have found *ill'ustrate* the only pronunciation authorized by the well-known philologist, Robert Gordon Latham, in that volume of his revision of Dr. Johnson's dictionary which came out in 1866. For some unexplained reason, it may here be remarked, this last-mentioned pronunciation has been specially provocative of bad language on the part of

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those objecting to its use. Against it the fiercest antagonism has been displayed. It has been stigmatized as abominable and hideous. The only thing to draw upon it these and other abusive epithets appears to be its modernism. Landor had doubtless heard the word so pronounced; but it is fairly safe to say that Horne Tooke never had.

The all-comprehensive ignorance, indeed, which was usually exhibited by Landor, of the history of the speech, of which he was wont to discourse dogmatically, made a notable manifestation of itself in the case of the word *conventicle* mentioned in the quotation cited above. The pronunciation to which he objected was not an innovation but a survival. Undoubtedly, the accent once rested upon the first syllable, with a secondary accent upon

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the third. So Shakespeare gave it in the single instance in which he used the word.<sup>1</sup> So it is found in Dryden. In his 'Hind and Panther,' that poet speaks of the class of religious fanatics,

"Who, far from steeples and their sacred  
sound,  
In fields their sullen conventicles found."<sup>2</sup>

This pronunciation, though unrecognized by Dr. Johnson, lasted certainly into the latter half of the eighteenth century; from Landor's observation it seems to have been still occasionally heard in the first half of the nineteenth. In the epilogue to Colman's 'Jealous Wife,' which was brought out in 1761, we find the ryme still preserving the older accentuation in the following lines:

<sup>1</sup> 2 Henry VI., iii., 1, 166.

<sup>2</sup> Part 1, l. 312.

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“The dame, of manner various, temper fickle,  
Now all for pleasure, now the conventicle.”

In general it may be said that in our tongue victory in the case of trisyllables is likely to rest with such as place the accent upon the third syllable from the end. Those who maintain the cause of the penultimate have fought manfully, indignantly, reproachfully against the encroachments of the antepenultimate party. But theirs has been usually a losing battle. Their lack of success is largely due to the fact that they are themselves compelled to acquiesce in many violations of the pronunciation based upon derivation which, in disputed cases, they profess to look upon as essential. The men most tenacious of respect for classical quantity will not venture to say, for instance, *audi'tor*, *ora'tor*, *sena'tor*, *victo'ry*, though logical-



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ly they are bound so to do. The argument from consistency carries, therefore, no weight. In our accentuation of words we are not really governed by that or by any other principle, save in the most general way. Our ear is likely to revolt at an unaccustomed pronunciation on no other ground than that we are not accustomed to it; just as on the same ground our eye is apt to revolt at a spelling with which we are not familiar. To fancy that our reason has anything to do with our feelings in either case is to betray our lack of acquaintance with the subject about which we are talking.

This, however, is a view which to many seems incomprehensible. They are always seeking for some infallible rule to guide their practice. If you say *dem'onstrate*, argue those who appeal to analogy, why do you not say

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*rem'onstrate?* That query seems to be regarded as crushing. Well, the latter word will not have its back broken if people should choose so to pronounce it. Even then it will continue to exist and flourish. To the question itself, however, there is but one answer. The users of speech do not say *rem'onstrate*, for the reason, satisfactory to them, that they have never had any disposition to do so in the past, nor have they so far developed any such desire in the present. Analogy affects them but slightly. Our whole orthoepic system is full of inconsistencies of the kind suggested. I once heard an educated man, a scholar, too, on certain lines, inveighing with great bitterness against the accentuation of *sojourn* on the last syllable. He seemed to think that such a pronunciation of the word was not only

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scandalously incorrect, but that it threatened somehow the purity of the speech. His anxiety was so excessive that it led to the natural inquiry, upon what syllable he placed the accent in the case of the word *adjourn*, corresponding both in spelling and derivation to *sojourn*; and if he put it upon the last—which he doubtless did—what defence he could make for his conduct. Pressing engagements compelled him to betake himself elsewhere before he could formulate the satisfactory answer he possibly had in mind.

To illustrate the trials of a pronunciation striving for recognition, let us trace the fortunes of *decorous*. Bailey, seemingly the first lexicographer to give accentuation, pronounced it *dec'orous*. But when Johnson brought out his dictionary he placed the stress upon the

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second syllable. His authority was so great that he was generally followed by those orthoepists of the eighteenth century who gave the word at all. Walker accepted this pronunciation under protest. "An uneducated English speaker," he remarked, "is very apt to pronounce the word with the accent on the first syllable, according to the analogy of his own language; but a learned ear would be as much shocked at such a departure from classical propriety as in the words *sonorous* and *canorous*." But the learned ear was somewhat distasteful to the lexicographer. He was so restive under the practice of imposing the Latin quantity upon the English word that when he came to the compound *indecorous* he broke away to some extent from most of preceding authorities, and allowed speakers the

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choice of placing the stress upon either the penult or the antepenult. Nor could he refrain from venting his wrath at the ordinary accentuation. He regarded it as a satire upon the good taste and sense of Englishmen. "Dr. Ash," he added, "is the only one who places the accent upon the antepenultimate; but what is his single authority, though with analogy upon his side, to a crowd of coxcombs vamping with scraps of Latin?"

But Walker confined his revolt to the compound; in the case of the simple word he did not venture to act according to his convictions. Instead he deferred to the practice of polite society. The furthest extent, therefore, to which his followers could go was to assert that it was *indec'orous* to accent *deco'rous* upon the first syllable. It was not till

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Webster came forward that the older accentuation was reintroduced, at least in a dictionary of any pretension. In his first edition of 1828 *dec'orous* appeared as the only authorized pronunciation. The later extensive circulation of his work caused this usage to spread far and wide in America. It must, however, have been then the general practice to accent it thus in this country, at least so far as Webster was acquainted with it; for, though a daring defier of the conventional in orthography, he was far from desiring to combat it in orthoepy. In England, Knowles, in 1835, gave both pronunciations of the word, but indicated a preference for that which laid the stress on the antepenult. The same course was followed in 1848 by Boag, who produced a dictionary in which he professed to follow Walker's orthoepy

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with improvements. Such also was the pronunciation adopted by Craig, whose work appeared in 1849, and by Thomas Wright in his, which followed in 1855. But for a long time the word received in the English dictionaries most generally followed the accent only on the penult. Of late the antepenultimate pronunciation is beginning to be sanctioned by some of the highest authorities. This probably means its eventual adoption by everybody.

Still, though the penultimate party is pretty certain to be worsted in a long-continued battle, it can inscribe upon its banners some notable triumphs. This has been due, in part, to the excesses of its opponents. Walker was so much influenced by his principle of analogy that he carried the accent so far from the end upon a number of words

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that they became somewhat difficult to pronounce. *Ac'ceptable* may stand as one illustration out of several. Accordingly, ease of utterance came to the aid of the advocates of the penultimate stress, and that too in cases where the classical quantity was not involved. *Schismatic*, *phlegmatic*, *splenetic*, for illustration, had once the accent regularly upon the first syllable. If dictionaries are to be deemed authority, the prevailing usage is now to place it upon the second syllable, especially in the case of the first two. No one apparently thinks any longer of laying the stress upon the first syllable of *successor*, a practice once seemingly much more common than laying it on the second. "There is little doubt," said Walker, "that the antepenultimate accent will prevail." A statement not essentially different



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can be made about *confessor*. In the case of this word Bailey placed the stress upon the second syllable; but in the large majority of eighteenth-century dictionaries it fell upon the first. If the poets can be taken to represent the usage accurately, this seems to have been both the earlier and the regular pronunciation. Walker quoted John Kemble as saying that the word was improperly accented on the first syllable; but he added, "This impropriety is now become so universal that no one who has the least pretence to politeness dares to pronounce it otherwise." With *horizon* the stress once fell upon the antepenult. Johnson rebuked Shakespeare for having falsely pronounced it that way. Yet Walker, writing towards the end of the same century, declared that "this word, till of late years, was uni-

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versally pronounced in prose with the accent on the first syllable." He clearly thought that this was the right course, at least theoretically. He seemed to attribute the disrepute into which the analogical pronunciation had fallen to the influence of the poets; and it is certain that with Milton, Cowley, and Dryden the word had the same stress which it has now.

This tendency to move the accent on towards the end gives more manifest exhibition of itself in words of two than of three syllables. We can see it exemplified now in the case of *sojourn*, just mentioned. The verse of poets, like Milton, shows that the stress once rested regularly, perhaps invariably, upon its first syllable. Were the word in common use, such a pronunciation would by this time have pretty surely come to

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seem old-fashioned. So, also, if Dr. Johnson's accentuation could be taken as representing the universal practice of his age, we should be compelled to believe that many words of two syllables which once had the accent upon the first, have now come to assume it upon the second. In the former way were pronounced by him *carbine*, *carmine*, *cartel*, *finance*, *gazette*, *levant* as a noun, *petard*, and *trepan*. It is evident, however, from various sources that the accentuation he authorized was not universally accepted; and in these instances the other method of pronunciation which then existed is the one which has descended to us.

More striking than any of these examples is *July*. Every student of our early poetry, especially of our dramatic poetry, becomes aware that this word

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was usually, if not invariably, pronounced *ʃu'ly*. So it continued to be down to the latter part of the eighteenth century, and to some extent later. Bailey and Johnson both placed the accent upon the first syllable. In so doing, they were in accord with the general practice of the orthoepists of the time. Indeed, the only early authorization I have personally chanced to meet of the present pronunciation is in the edition of Dyche and Pardon's dictionary, which came out in 1750.<sup>1</sup> But

<sup>1</sup> The English dictionary of Thomas Dyche, left unfinished by him, was revised and completed by William Pardon after Dyche's death. The first part of it appeared in April, 1735. It seems to have been a successful work. The only edition of it I have seen—that of 1750—is the sixth. It is probable that its accentuation of *ʃuly* on the last syllable is found in the original edition of 1735.

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though then to some extent in use, it met with little favor. "This, we confess," said of it a reviewer in 1773, "is a common way of pronouncing the word, but surely improper."<sup>1</sup>

In the case of trisyllables, too, the accent has in several instances remained faithful to the classical quantity, in spite of persistent attacks upon it from those who either ignorantly or advisedly seek to establish their pronunciation according to English analogy. All efforts, for illustration, to have the stress fall on the first syllable of *inquiry*, *opponent*, *museum*—and these efforts have been frequent and long continued—have so far invariably resulted in disaster. No authority of repute recognizes *in'quiry*, *op'ponent*, *mu'seum*, and such pronunciations always beget a

<sup>1</sup>*Critical Review*, vol. xxxvi., p. 344.

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feeling of pity or pain in the hearts of those who deem themselves orthoepically pure. Furthermore, in every stream of tendency there are occasional eddies. There is a striking example of a pronunciation which the users of speech have fixed upon in defiance of all authority. Most persons in the northern United States are familiar with the fragrant creeper called the "trailing arbutus." No one who knows the plant thinks—at least no one used to think—of pronouncing the last word of its name any other way than *arbu'tus*. Yet in the Latin substantive from which it came the quantity of the penult is short. Accordingly, if we conform to the pronunciation of the original, we should be obliged to call it *ar'butus*. The word itself did not appear in the earliest pronouncing dictionaries. Its place was

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taken by *arbut*, with the accent upon the first syllable. But, for all that, it had long existed in the language. What few notices are taken of its pronunciation indicate that the practice existed even in the eighteenth century of laying the stress upon the second syllable. Nares mentioned it in 1784. In his work on orthoepy, then published, he pointed out that the word was commonly pronounced *arbu'tus*, "though," he added, "*ar'butus* is more proper." This popular accentuation has usually been somewhat distressing to the modern lexicographer. It flies in the face of both English analogy and classical quantity. When orthoepists adopt it, they are apt to do so with apologies. Some of them make a compromise between the respect due to popular pronunciation and to the Latin quantity by

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putting the accent on the first syllable and making the *u* of the second long—a pronunciation which could not well have existed at first outside of dictionaries, if even now it exists anywhere else.

Names of places hardly come under consideration in a discussion of this nature. In such words the local pronunciation generally remains constant; it is regarded as authoritative, and outsiders are expected to conform to it as soon as they have learned what it is. For instance, Queen Victoria's residence at Balmoral brought that name prominently before the public. It is not surprising that some who had never heard the word pronounced should seek to make it conform to English analogy, and place the accent upon the first syllable instead of the second. But from the very nature of things this could not prevail. The



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one instance of change in words of this class, which stands out with exceptional prominence, is Niagara. If the evidence of poetry be regarded as conclusive, the accent during the eighteenth century rested upon the penult. The quotation commonly employed to illustrate the practice comes from 'The Traveller.' In it Goldsmith pictures the distresses which await the emigrants to American shores. Among the various dreary scenes in which it will be their lot to find themselves, one is to be

"Where wild Oswego spreads her swamps  
around,  
And Niagara stuns with thundering sound."

This accentuation is occasionally found much later. To *The Scenic Annual* for 1838 Campbell contributed a poem celebrating the beauties of Cora Linn. In

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it occur the following lines about this waterfall:

“ Dear Linn! let loftier falling floods  
Have prouder names than thine;  
And king of all, enthroned in woods,  
Let Niagara shine.”

The necessities of the verse may have forced Campbell into the adoption of this accentuation, or the pronunciation of his youth may have clung to him; but he did not escape being taken severely to task by the reviewers for placing the stress where he did.

Still, after all that has been said, controversy about the place of the accent is limited to a comparatively small number of words. These produce more impression upon our minds than they ought, because of the wrath which difference of opinion about them excites in the most amiable natures. The truth is

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that any one who makes a study of the pronunciation authorized by the various orthoepists of the eighteenth century will be struck by the little change which has taken place, on the whole, in this precise particular. If he should consult one work only, it might, indeed, appear somewhat extensive; but if he consults them all, he is reasonably sure to find the modern accentuation sanctioned by some of them. Of two or more ways of laying the stress which once prevailed, the now existing one not infrequently remains the sole survivor. At present we all say *com'promise*. There was a time when we could have said *comprom'ise*, and have cited to justify us the authority of the dictionary most widely in use. So, also, we should have found it sanctioning *thea'tre*, and *inval'id* both as a noun and an adjective. Compared, in-

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deed, with the variations found in the treatment of vowel sounds by the users of speech, changes caused by difference of accentuation are of slight account. Nor is this agency of anything like the importance of the second one which remains to be considered. This is the disposition to make the pronunciation conform to the spelling. English, with its lawless orthography, opens a wide field for the operation of such an influence. It is necessarily limited in its range, but in the range it has it works unceasingly. The disposition has been exhibited at times from the earliest period. With the spread of education it has entered upon a fuller and more vigorous activity.

The reason for the increase in this tendency is manifest. In early times knowledge of the speech was gained al-

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most exclusively through the ear; at present it is learned largely through the eye. Men now make their first acquaintance with many words by seeing them upon the printed page. In numerous instances, after having seen them there, they rarely hear them spoken. Accordingly, it is natural that they should try to pronounce them as near as they possibly can to the way in which they are spelled. This of itself has a tendency to produce variation. The phonetic sense of the English-speaking race has been rendered so defective by the confused orthography of the tongue that to different men the same combination of letters will convey different sounds. It is no uncommon thing, in consequence, to find illiterate spelling designated as phonetic spelling by men who are unaware that in so do-

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ing they are unconsciously proclaiming their own ignorance of phonetics.

Yet this movement towards diversity is more than counterbalanced by the movement towards uniformity, which the general habit of reading has created. From the frequency with which a word is met on the page a picture of it, as spelled, is insensibly fixed in the mind. It may almost be said to be printed on the retina of the eye. When, in consequence, the word is brought directly to the attention, and along with this comes the necessity of using it in speech, there is more or less of a disposition, conscious or unconscious, to conform its pronunciation to its ever-present mental representative. Against a usage which has become thoroughly established this tendency makes slow headway; in the case of in-

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dividuals it may make none at all. But in process of time it is sure to work effectively upon a large body of users of speech. If it once gains over a part, its ultimate triumph is secure. We have seen this illustrated in the case of *china*, *lilac*, *asparagus*, and other words. To put the point beyond dispute, let us trace the history of the pronunciation of a few more.

Readers of 'Vanity Fair' may remember that the young ladies of Miss Pinkerton's academy, at Chiswick Mall, were presented at their departure with a copy of Dr. Johnson's dictionary. They may not have observed, however, that the word designating the work was, in the conversations given, regularly spelled *dixonary*. Even so it is represented as having been pronounced by the august female who presided over the

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institute, the friend of the lexicographer himself, and the correspondent of Mrs. Chapone. Thackeray may have erred in carrying this pronunciation—at least in a place so sacred—down to so late a period as the year just preceding the battle of Waterloo, but he certainly made no mistake in giving the impression that it was the one once regularly heard in cultivated society. It existed long before the time specified. It can be traced back with certainty to the seventeenth century. In the latter part of that and in the beginning of the eighteenth the pronunciation was represented as *diks'nari* by the two authorities who chanced to mention this particular word. In 1726, in the little book of Bailey's, already mentioned, it was represented by *dix'nery*. Fourteen years later 'Bailey's Dicksonary' is



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mentioned by one of the characters in an article contributed by Fielding to *The Champion*.<sup>1</sup> In America, Noah Webster, writing in 1789, gives *dicsonary* as the usual pronunciation. In the last decade of this same century Walker informs us that the word was universally pronounced a few years before as if written *dixnary*, and that a person would have been thought a pedant who pronounced it according to its orthography. He felicitated himself on the taste for improvement in speaking which had been steadily growing. To it he attributed the change which had taken place. So marked was this that at the time his work appeared he asserted that any one who pronounced the word otherwise than as it was written would have incurred the imputation of

<sup>1</sup> Number for May 17, 1740.

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vulgarity. The fact was probably as he represented; not so his interpretation of the fact. There is no need of resorting to an explanation so vague and general as the taste for improvement on the part of the public. The change was but an exemplification of the influence of the written speech which had been becoming steadily more effective. In this particular instance the multiplication of dictionaries, which went on after the middle of the eighteenth century, brought this word constantly and prominently before the eyes of readers. The not unusual result followed. The full sound followed upon frequent sight. It is to be added that Thackeray's spelling — with an inserted *o* — which had previously been used by Fielding and noted by Webster, probably marked a pronunciation which held its own in certain quarters.

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This is an illustration belonging to the consonant system rather than the vowel; but the latter exhibits its full number of examples of the same tendency. We hear at the present day, and sometimes from the lips of educated men, the verb *catch* pronounced as *ketch*. No really virtuous lexicographer of modern times would be found countenancing any practice of the sort. Most orthoepists do not even condescend to be aware of its existence. Yet there is every reason to believe that until a comparatively late period it was the common pronunciation of the word even among the educated. In the divorce which has gone on so long in our language between orthography and orthoepy, it is unsafe to hazard positive statements of any kind. But in this case there is evidence pointing to the fact that while in most

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instances *a* has been the vowel generally seen in writing, *e* has been the one generally heard in conversation. Sometimes, indeed, the spelling conformed to this pronunciation. Examples of the usage can be adduced from various periods. Spenser, for instance, tells us how the enchanter Archimage, in his endeavor to entrap the Red Cross Knight, placed spies upon his movements,

“To *ketch* him at a vantage in his snares.”<sup>1</sup>

From the orthoepists of the eighteenth century we can get occasional traces of the changes coming over the sound of the vowel in this word, as in several others. Nares had clearly heard of no other way of pronouncing it than *ketch*. A few years later Walker censured this usage, nor would he give it his sanction

<sup>1</sup> ‘*Faerie Queene*,’ book ii., canto i., 4.

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in his dictionary. Yet he admitted that it was almost universally pronounced in the capital like the noun *ketch*. "This deviation," he continued, "from the true sound of *a* is only tolerable in colloquial pronunciation, and ought, by correct speakers, to be avoided even in that." There spoke the stern orthoepist; yet he pusillanimously acquiesced in the exactly similar pronunciation of the vowel in *any* and *many*.

Not so acted, it may be remarked here, the earliest compiler of a pronouncing dictionary. Buchanan, long before Walker had contemplated a work of this character, had stoutly maintained the sound of *a*, not only in *catch*, but in *any* and *many* also. As regards the first one of these last two he was followed by Sheridan. This, however, was pretty certainly a school-master pronun-

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ciation which was little, if ever, heard in polite society. But Buchanan, who was of the type of Holofernes, had no mind to bow the knee to any fashionable orthoepic Baal. He was always inclined to support the cause of the written word against the spoken. He would not admit the sound of *e* in *radish*. About this vegetable, it may be remarked in passing, Walker did not have the same feeling of despondency which he did about the other terms for food. The word, he admitted, was commonly, though corruptly, pronounced as if written *reddish*. Still the deviation was but small, nor did he regard it as "so incorrigible as that of its brother esculents," such as *cucumber* and *asparagus*.

These are examples of the encroachments of the vowel *e* upon *a*; but a similar fortune has fallen to the lot of *e*

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at the hands of *i*. The former, indeed, has only gradually resumed the rights of which it had been deprived by the latter. Nearly all eighteenth-century orthoepists pronounced *yes* as if it were spelled *jis*. Indeed, Walker took the pains to assure us that while it was a mark of incorrectness and vulgarity to give to *yet* the sound of *yit*, the best and most established usage gave to *yes* the sound of *jis*. *Yit*, thus reprobated, was undoubtedly a survival of what was once good usage. The triumph of *e* over *i* in its pronunciation merely preceded its later triumph in *yes*. The same thing is going on before our eyes to-day. Orthoepists rarely record changes till they have established themselves somewhere to an extent which permits their being no longer disregarded. None of them, in

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consequence, admits any other pronunciation of *pretty* than *pritty*; yet in conversation the vowel *e* is beginning to make itself heard in the first syllable of the word. Once recognized, it is fairly certain to prevail in the end. It is not unlikely, in consequence, that *pritty* will come in time to seem as objectionable to men as does now *ingine* for *engine*.

It would be easy to enlarge the list of examples in which the spoken word has been made to conform to the written. *Construe* has abandoned its ancient pronunciation of *con'ster*, though the schools clung long to the once-prevalent practice. Walker resented this usage almost as if it were a personal affront; but he felt obliged to recognize it and to accord it second place. "It is a scandal to seminaries of learning," he burst out,



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“that the latter pronunciation of the word should prevail there. Those who ought to be the guardians of propriety are often the perverters of it.” Here, however, the written word has finally triumphed, as in several other instances. No one now pronounces *chart* as if it were spelled *kart*. Lawyers are pretty generally giving up *con'isance* for *cog'nizance*, and military men *en'sin* for *en-sign*. *Shore* is not now heard for *sewer*. Even *shire*, once regularly *sheer*, has had its ancient vowel sound replaced, save in compounds, by that which the English have accustomed themselves to give to *i*. In all these instances a steady movement has gone on towards accommodating the spoken word to the written. Colloquial or provincial speech will long continue to retain the old pronunciations. But even in those quarters they

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tend to die out with the increase of the habit of reading and the steadily waxing influence of the school-master. Furthermore, in most, if not in all, of the instances where anomalies now exist or once existed, it will be found that the current pronunciation represents a form of the word which at some time or at some place prevailed in writing as well as in speaking. Illustrations of this are frequent. As good a one as any is furnished by the name itself of our language. We spell it *English*; we pronounce it *Ing'lish*; and we pronounce it so because by many it was once so spelled.

In thus striving to make the spoken word conform to the written, we are simply obeying the dictates of that phonetic instinct which, stunted as it has been with us by our orthography,

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still maintains a lively struggle for existence in us all. The growing disposition to respect the right of the written speech is shown in the tendency manifested to give the full pronunciation to trisyllables which once appeared as disyllables. This middle syllable consisted only of a vowel. It was easy to suppress, and it was suppressed. It is not safe to affirm positively in any particular case how far poetry represents the pronunciation of the past. The necessities of the verse frequently require elision, and elision overrides the claims of orthoepy. Yet it may be regarded as of some significance that Milton, for instance, makes two syllables of such words as *barbarous*, *violent*, *popular*, *populous*, *credulous*, to mention a few out of a larger number. That is to say, he makes them so, if we insist upon assign-

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ing to the line its exact number of feet.

But whatever may be the value we attach to the testimony conveyed by the practice of poets, there can be no question about the evidence furnished by pronouncing dictionaries. Words in which a dissyllabic pronunciation was set down frequently in the early works of this character as the only one have in the later ones the suppressed vowel sounded. *Venison*, *medicine*, *business*, *tapestry* are now no longer heard as words of two syllables exclusively; in some of these examples rarely so, if ever. Variation must have existed on this point at an early date. Sheridan, for illustration, has *venison* as a word of three syllables and *tapestry* as one of two. On the contrary, Walker has *venison* as a word of two syllables and *tap-*

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*estry* as one of three. The tendency shows itself in other polysyllables. The *i* of *ordinary* is now regularly heard, and *extraordinary* is fairly certain ultimately to follow in its footsteps. *Nominative* is strictly a word of four syllables, but in school pronunciation it is often reduced to three. Once this was so generally the case that to sound the first *i* at all would have seemed stiff and pedantic. This vowel, indeed, has disappeared from *ordinance* in one of its meanings; but thereby it has created an independent word, *ordnance*. *Damsel* is in something of the same situation. It has lost the ability to resume its trisyllabic character by being deprived of the *e* or *i* it once possessed. But, as a compensation, modern writers, beginning with Scott, have reintroduced an *o* from a usage once existing. This is to give a

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more stately character to the word, to indicate the more stately being it is supposed to denote.

But the working of this agency is shown on a much more extensive scale in the steady resumption in speech of consonants which were once silent. This has been going on to some extent from the time that men began to become familiar with the language as written. Among the letters particularly affected by this tendency are *d* and *t* and *w*. It is not possible to learn accurately how far the dropping of these from the pronunciation once went. We can, however, make a guess at the number of words in which they must have been silent from the number in which they remain silent still. This last statement is particularly true of the letter *t*. No one thinks of pronouncing it in *apostle*, *epistle*, *chestnut*,

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*Christmas*, and certain verbs having the ending *-en*, such as *fasten*, *hasten*, *listen*—and these are merely a few of the many examples which could be cited. *Answer* and *sword* will furnish similar illustrations of present usage in the case of *w*. The same thing is true, though not so true, of *d*. In its case it is not so much the disappearance of the letter from utterance as is the little stress it receives. In ordinary speech it is often heard so faintly that it can hardly be said to be heard at all. Any one paying strict heed to the use of certain words—say, for example, *landlord* and *thousand*—will often find it difficult to detect the sound of *d* at the end of the first syllable of the one or of the last syllable of the other. Still, any inclination to disregard the full pronunciation of final letters is distinctly on the wane. The omission of it, once

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common in several words, is no longer found. For instance, it was not until the nineteenth century that the *t* of *currant* was generally pronounced. The disposition, indeed, to sound a letter in speaking because it exists in writing goes at times to somewhat unreasonable lengths. Public speakers are occasionally heard who strive painfully to pronounce the *n* of such words as *condemn* and *contemn*, feeling very miserable when they fail, and making others feel very miserable when they succeed.

But the two letters which have the most interesting history in this respect are *l* and *h*. They have been less affected, on the whole, by the disposition of the users of language to let no part of the word remain unsounded that can be sounded; for there are combinations from the pronunciation of which the



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vocal organs of the English retire baffled. Still, *l* is now heard in several instances—as, for example, *chaldron*, *falter*, *vault*—in which it was once silent. It is slowly forcing its recognition in several other words. Yet there remain a respectable number in which it is not sounded. Especially is this the case when it belongs to a syllable in which it follows *a* or *o* and precedes *f*, *k*, or *m*. The words *half*, *folk*, *calm*, and *walk* will serve as illustrations. In such cases it is that the spoken language has resisted most successfully the encroachment of the written. But even here its tenure is far from secure. Particularly is this so when the *l* is preceded by *o*. Most orthoepists give the preference to its pronunciation in *holm*, and some authorize it in *yolk*.

In this particular, no more entertain-

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ing controversy has there been than that which has gone on concerning the word *golf*. In the Scotch pronunciation of it the *l* is not sounded; in old days it often did not appear in it when written. So long as the knowledge of the game was confined to the country of its origin, variation naturally would not arise. But as soon as it passed, and, furthermore, passed suddenly, the narrow limits of nationality, the name was certain to lose its provincial pronunciation. The large majority of men came to know the word designating it only by seeing it in print. So making its acquaintance, they were reasonably sure to pronounce it as spelled. This involved the resumption in speech of the letter hitherto confined to the written language. But Scotland insists that there is but one proper way of pronouncing the

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word; and because men everywhere will not adopt that she is in mourning and refuses to be comforted. Letters on the subject are written constantly to the newspapers by indignant North Britons. Their remonstrances doubtless affect some weaker brethren. The indifferent, however — and these constitute the vast majority — go on their way regardless of the Scotch orthoepey. The more hardened retort that they are doubtless pronouncing the word as did those who invented or developed the game. These did not put in its name a letter of which they made no use. It was the slovenly pronunciation of their descendants which had caused the *l* to be suppressed. All that they are doing now is to restore to the letter the rights of which it has been deprived.

It is the written speech that is thus

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slowly bringing about changes in pronunciation. The working of this agency can be best shown by specific illustration of the way in which a letter chances to remain for a long while silent, and then comes to be taken up in pronunciation. Readers of Chaucer do not need to be told that such words as *assault*, *fault*, and *default* came into the language from the Old French in the forms *assaute*, *faute*, and *defaute*. So they were spelled; so they were pronounced. But in process of time men discovered that their remote Latin originals contained an *l*. Accordingly, it was inserted in these words. But while their form was thus changed, the original pronunciation continued. But the letter was not to endure forever the indignity of having its existence ignored. It appealed constantly to the eye; and the eye in time

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insisted upon the recognition of it by the voice. Take the case of *fault*. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the *l* had been almost universally adopted in the spelling; but it was not until the latter part of the eighteenth century that its claim, though sometimes previously admitted, was fully established in the pronunciation. By Pope and Swift it was regularly rymed with words like *ought*, *brought*, *thought*, and *taught*. The remarks upon it by Dr. Johnson in his dictionary indicate that the struggle for recognition was going on actively in his time. "The *l*," he said, "is sometimes sounded and sometimes not. In conversation it is generally suppressed." Later orthoepists report the existence of the same state of things. It is further borne out by the evidence of the literature produced at

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the time. In 'The Deserted Village,' published in 1770, we are told of the school-master:

"Yet he was kind, or, if severe in aught,  
The love he bore to learning was in fault."

To us *ought* and *fault* make an imperfect ryme; but to Goldsmith and to many, if not to most, of his contemporaries no better one could be asked. It was not in the nature of things that this violation of the rights of the letter could endure. By the end of the century Walker felt justified in applying to its suppression the one adjective dearest to the earnest orthoepist. He termed it vulgar.

Of these two letters, however, the aspirate is the more interesting and the history of its pronunciation is much more striking. The dropping of it seems to be regarded by many Amer-

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icans as peculiar to the London cockney dialect, or at least to Englishmen of a certain social grade. This is quite wide of the truth. The omission of the sound of *h* may be said to belong to all times and all countries. The Italian language has given up its pronunciation and treats it rather as a mark of distinction than as a letter. In Old French also it was largely unrecognized. Nor can a single member of the English-speaking race plead that he is free from the commission of the offence, if offence it be. None of us, either in writing or speaking, gives to *it* or to *able* or *ability* or *arbor* the *h* to which, etymologically, each one is entitled. Worse than that, we all add it to the original forms from which come *hermit* and *hostage*. Had we not succumbed to the influence of what we now call cockney-

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ism, we should never have prefixed the aspirate to these words; but, on the contrary, we should have been saying, with great linguistic propriety, *ermit* (or *eremite*) and *ostage*. There is, in consequence, no reason for any of us to plume ourselves upon any special orthoepic virtue of our own in this matter, at least no reason for those of us who believe that safety lies in paying strictest heed to derivation.

Still it must be deemed a somewhat singular fact that this ancient and widespread peculiarity of pronunciation has apparently at no time or place ever shown itself in America. Many usages of English dialects have been transplanted to this country. In some instances they have made their way into educated speech. But the one most striking and the most far-reaching of all



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has never been carried over, or if carried over has never maintained itself sufficiently to gain recognition anywhere. In England the omission or addition of the aspirate has become a sort of social shibboleth. It has never assumed and could never assume that function in this country. Here the pronunciation of initial *h* is universal. No mistake in the use of it is made by the uneducated any more than by the educated. The former drop it from the few words where it is not sounded as correctly as do the latter. The same thing may be said of it, in general, as regards its combination with *w*. It is the exception, and by no means frequent exception, to find the aspirate not distinctly heard in such words as *when* and *which* and *Whig*. Why this marked difference should exist in the usage of the two countries it is

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not easy to understand. It is fully as hard to explain as why the inhabitants of the United Kingdom turn universally to the left in riding or driving and the inhabitants of the United States turn as universally to the right.

There are now in English but four words beginning with *h* in which the initial letter is not pronounced by educated men anywhere. These are *heir*, *honest*, *honor*, and *hour*. This usage extends, of course, to their derivatives. Whether they will continue to hold out forever against the stream of tendency which is bringing about the resumption in speech of letters once silent must be left to the prophets to announce. In this particular instance their predictions can be uttered with perfect safety. None of those now living will survive to witness their fulfilment or non-fulfil-

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ment. So far no one has ever advocated the pronunciation in them of the initial letter save Walter Savage Landor. He may have been led to take this course by the irritation he felt at having his own usage criticised; for when it came to the employment of the *h*, he is reported to have frequently exhibited distinct orthoepic frailty. "We laugh," said he, "at those who pronounce an aspirate where there should be none; but are not we ourselves more ridiculous when we deliberately write it before words in which it is never pronounced?"

So he argued earnestly, but naturally to no effect. Still, while there is now not the remotest sign of the abandonment of the existing usage, it must be kept in mind that the influence of the written language is ceaselessly operative. To some the ultimate fate of

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these four words will seem to be foreshadowed by the wavering attitude of the present users of speech towards four others—*herb*, *hostler*, *humble*, and *humor*. Until a period comparatively recent all of these generally dropped the *h*. Discussion about doing this was going on, as we have seen, during the latter part of the eighteenth century. Then, as now, there was difference of opinion, both among orthoepists and the educated users of speech, as to the proper course to be pursued. Sheridan supported the pronunciation of *h* in *herb*, Walker its suppression. Nor has the controversy about these words yet been settled. Many still continue to omit the aspirate in some or all of them, though the number so doing is perhaps becoming proportionately smaller. The practice of not pronouncing the *h* of

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*humble* can hardly recover, it would seem, from the staggering blow given it by Dickens. Yet it still has its supporters and defenders. The suppression in speech of the same letter in *hostler* has developed the form *ostler* in writing. This adds the strength of the visible word to the indisposition to pronounce the aspirate.

This omission of the pronunciation of the initial *h* is now true of only a few words; it must once have been true of a large number. But if so, no record of the fact has in many cases come down to our time. In a few instances we are in a position to make positive statements. We know from Palsgrave that in the sixteenth century the *h* of *habit* and *habitation* was not sounded;<sup>1</sup> from

<sup>1</sup>Palsgrave's 'Lesclaircissement de la Langue Francoyse' was published in 1530.

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Ben Jonson that in the early seventeenth century the same was true of the *h* of *host*. A relic of this latter usage has come down to us in the expression "mine host." Late in the eighteenth century the *h* of *hospital* was usually dropped, according to the assertions of the most authoritative orthoepists. It is to be observed that all these words in which the aspirate is not pronounced are of Romance origin. They came into our language from the Old French. In that tongue they appeared frequently in writing, as in speech, without the letter. In this way, accordingly, they sometimes made their appearance in English, when, in the thirteenth or the fourteenth century, they were introduced into the tongue. Of the words which have been mentioned—and many more might be added to the list—the forms *eir*, *erb*,

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*onest, onur, oure, umble, umour* turn up not unfrequently in our early literature. The story to be told about them and others like them is essentially the same as that already told about *fault*. In England, as in France, the scribes familiar with the Latin original restored the *h* to the written word. They could not and did not restore it to the pronunciation. That came later; in some cases it has not come at all.

Furthermore, while the total suppression of the aspirate at the beginning of certain words or certain syllables of compound words is now limited to a very few, there is a weakened way of sounding it which leaves it in many instances scarcely recognizable. This is particularly true of polysyllables in which the accent rests upon the second. It may be there exist men who say "a

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hotel," "a historical fact," but such expressions are certainly uncommon in literature, if ever found there at all. The present practice of using *an* instead of *a* before such words may die out in consequence of the more distinct pronunciation of the *h*, but it has not died out yet. Indeed, this weakened pronunciation of the aspirate must have once been true of many words of Teutonic origin. The authorized version of the Bible represents the speech of the first half or middle of the sixteenth century. It is a somewhat significant fact that nearly all the words in it beginning with *h* have usually the indefinite article *an* before them, and not *a*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In our version of the Bible *an* invariably precedes the following words: *habitation, hair, half, hand, handbreadth, handful, handmaid, hanging, harlot, hart, harvest, haughty, haven, head, hearth, heavy, hedge, heifer, help, herald,*



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Under ordinary conditions this tendency to resume in speech the sound of letters once silent would not extend to names of places. There the local pronunciation, supported as it usually is by centuries of usage, would hold its own against all change, as it has in the case of the accent. But in this matter another agency has come in which cannot be disregarded. This is the extent

*herb, herdsman, heritage, hiding-place, hire, hireling, hollow, homer, honeycomb, honor, honorable, hook, horn, horror, horse, horseman, host, householder, howling, humble, hundred, hungry, husband, husbandman, hymn, hypocrite, hypocritical.*

A is used exclusively before the five words *hen, hind, home-born, hot, huge.*

Before the following both *an* and *a* are found: *hairy, hammer, hard, harp, heap, heart, high, highway, hill, hole, holy, house*; but the use of *an* is far more common than the use of *a*.

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to which intercommunication now goes on as a result of the development of the railway system. It is mixing together the population of different parts of the same country to a degree which in the past was never deemed possible. Pronunciation is one of the things most profoundly affected by it. Places are now visited by large numbers, or at least brought to their attention, which were once known to but a limited few. Their names appear in guide-books and train schedules. These proper nouns, like the uncommon common nouns, come before the eyes of large bodies of men who have never heard them uttered. The usual result follows. The pronunciation is made to conform, as far as possible, to the spelling. All the syllables are sounded; and by the mere weight of numbers following it, the practice some-

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times comes to establish itself finally over the local usage. The substitution which is now going on of the full sound of Cirencester for Cissiter, and of Anstruther for Anster — to cite two instances — simply typifies what is taking place elsewhere in numerous cases, though perhaps on not so marked a scale. Nor is the effect of this influence limited to towns comparatively obscure. The *d* of London was probably never suppressed by all classes of the population, but there was certainly a time when in polite circles it was not the fashion to pronounce it. "In my youth," said Rogers, who was born in 1763, "everybody said *Lonnon* and not *London*. Fox said *Lonnon* to the last." Rogers here meant everybody who was anybody in the eyes of fashionable society. Before he had lived out half his

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days he saw this pronunciation disappear before the influence of the written speech.

Such is the general trend of the language. But we must guard ourselves against the belief that any considerable body of words will be affected by the movement steadily going on to conform the pronunciation to the spelling. The examples are impressive when taken separately; their whole number is, comparatively speaking, insignificant. The deep-seated defects of our orthoepic system will never be cured by palliatives of this sort. As in accentuation, so there are here, too, occasional eddies in the general stream of tendency. At times the spoken word, so far from conforming to the written, shows a distinct tendency to depart from it. As good an illustration as any of this sort of

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reaction can be found in the present English pronunciation of *schedule*, to which reference has already been made. This is one of the few words in which the pronunciation of the seventeenth century has been definitely recorded. In the three works in which mention is then made of it, its first syllable is represented by either *sked* or *sed*. This continued to be the case during the whole of the eighteenth century. No orthoepist of the time, so far as I can discover, gave the syllable any other pronunciation than one of the two just specified. *Sked* conformed best to analogy. In words of our tongue which have a Latin or Greek original, *ch* has almost invariably the sound of *k*. In the case of *sch* the one notable exception now existing is *schism*, in which the *ch* is suppressed altogether.

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*Sked* and *sed* were, accordingly, the only two ways in which orthoepists, down to the end of the eighteenth century, represented the pronunciation of the first syllable of *schedule*. But in its case there was then unmistakably manifested a tendency to abandon the regular sound of *ch* heard in *scheme* and *school*, and to follow the example of *schism* in ignoring it entirely. If orthoepists are to be trusted, the latter was much the more prevailing usage. The practice may have been handed down from a time when one of the forms under which the word appeared was *cedule*. At all events, the result was that *schism* and *schedule* came to constitute a sort of class by themselves. When, therefore, the pronunciation of the first syllable of the latter as *shed* began to be heard, it must at first have made something of

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the impression of being an exception to an exception. The precise time when the practice of so sounding it was adopted generally in England it is difficult to ascertain with precision. It is assuredly a singular fact that Walker, who was careful to note the variations of usage in his time, had apparently never heard of *shed*. He knew it only as a theoretical pronunciation which had no existence in reality. It was not authorized even in the fifth edition of his dictionary, brought out in 1809, two years after his death, but containing his latest conclusions and corrections. He pointed out that *sed* was then the general, though not the exclusive, pronunciation. "Entirely sinking the *ch* of *schedule*," he remarked, "seems to be the prevailing mode, and too firmly fixed by custom to be altered in favor of either

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of its original words." By these latter he meant the Latin *schedula* and the French *schedule*.

Walker's forecast, as we see, has met the usual fate of orthoepic prophecies. Yet the regularly accepted modern pronunciation of the word in England seems to have leaped into general recognition with comparative suddenness. The first instance in which I have been enabled to find it authorized is in Knowles's dictionary of 1835. The next year it appeared in the revision of Walker made by Smart. This orthoepist was clearly puzzled how to account for the existence of the anomaly. "An unnecessary reference of *schedule* to its French denizenship," he wrote, "with some vague notion perhaps of the alliance of our English *sh* to the Teutonic *sch* has drawn the word into the very irregular pronuncia-



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tion of *shēd -ule*." This latter representation of it was one of the actual forms in which the word had been earlier spelled. It may be, therefore, that the corresponding pronunciation, though unrecognized by orthoepists, had been transmitted from father to son for generations. Thus continuing, it passed in the first half of the nineteenth century the bounds of the class to which it had been confined, and became the general though not the exclusive favorite among the users of speech in England. This seems to be the best if not the only way of explaining its sudden prevalence after having been previously ignored for so long a time. America, as a whole, has always been faithful to what is strictly the regular pronunciation looked at from the orthographical point of view.

The examples which have been re-

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corded give some conception of the influences which have been steadily at work in modifying or changing pronunciation. With the variations already existing, and those coming to exist, it is not surprising to find that orthoepists themselves are not unfrequently in a state of perplexity. Naturally, much more so are the ordinary users of speech. It is no wonder, therefore, that large numbers of them should be constantly hesitating as to the propriety of their own pronunciation. They find themselves at sea, tossed about by winds from every quarter, and with little apparent prospect of reaching any secure orthoepical haven. The standard of authority is what they are clamoring for; they are ready to submit to it the moment it has established its right to rule. But where is it to be found? It was Gold-

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smith who expressed a desire to discover that happiest spot on earth which all pretend to know, but about the exact position of which the representatives of no two countries agree. It is the same in pronunciation. Where exists that perfect standard which all orthoepists assert or imply that they have furnished, but in the representation of which in numerous particulars no two of them concur?

### III

FROM what quarter are we to look for the coming of this infallible guide for whose arrival we are all longing? It seems never to have occurred to any of the compilers of dictionaries, and to but few of those who consult them, that the simple solution of the whole difficulty is that in the matter of pronunciation there is no standard of authority at all. Nor, as things now are, can there be. Pronunciation must and will vary widely among persons of equal intelligence and cultivation. A dictionary which sets out to establish on a solid base an authoritative standard is bound to take into account

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the practice of the whole body of educated men the world over who are entitled to consideration. How is that to be ascertained? The mere statement of the fact shows its physical impossibility. It is a task beyond the power of any one person or any number of persons to accomplish.

Even this is not the worst. If everybody worth consulting could be consulted, we should still be left in precisely the same state of uncertainty in which we were before. Dr. Johnson saw at once the difficulty in the way when Sheridan's proposal of a pronouncing dictionary was brought to his attention in 1761. "Sir," said he, "what entitles Sheridan to fix the pronunciation of English? He has, in the first place, the disadvantage of being an Irishman; and if he says he will fix it after the example of the best

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company, why, they differ among themselves. I remember an instance: when I published the Plan for my Dictionary, Lord Chesterfield told me that the word *great* should be pronounced so as to rhyme to *state*; and Sir William Yonge sent me word that it should be pronounced so as to rhyme to *seat*, and that none but an Irishman would pronounce it *grait*. Now here were two men of the highest rank, the one the best speaker in the House of Lords, the other the best speaker in the House of Commons, differing entirely." It is typical of the uncertainty attending the whole matter—by some it will be held typical of the fortunes of the distressful country—that in the middle of the century Sir William Yonge should declare that only an Irishman would pronounce *great* so as to rhyme to *state*; while towards the end of

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the same century Walker is found declaring, with equal positiveness, that practically none but Irishmen pronounced it so as to rhyme to *seat*.

Still this belief in the existence of a standard authority is one that will die hard even with the educated class. With the semi-educated class it will never die at all. The most venerable of the myths concerning it is that it is found flourishing somewhere in London and its environs. This is a superstition which the inhabitants of that city are naturally disposed to believe in themselves and to encourage in others. They are apt to reward with praise those who accept and proclaim this view, and to visit with censure, if not with contumely, those who dissent from it. One reason for the popularity of Worcester's dictionary in England was due to the

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fact that he loudly professed to conform the pronunciation authorized in it to the usage of London. No one stopped to ask how he managed to acquire it. The usage of London, indeed, might reasonably be taken as a guide, for lack of a better, if any one would or could be good enough to tell us what the usage of London really is. So far this has never been done. The dictionaries which profess to record it record it differently. They could not well do otherwise. There prevails now, and always has prevailed, diversity of pronunciation among the educated inhabitants of that city as among the similar dwellers of any other place.

The futility of this widely proclaimed standard is fully recognized even in London itself by those most competent to form an opinion. In 1869 the late Alex-



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ander John Ellis brought out the second part of his great work on the pronunciation of Chaucer and Shakespeare. In the course of the discussion it came in his way to consider this very question. In referring to the authorities usually followed by his fellow-countrymen—necessarily including those of his own city—he informed us that Smart's of 1846 and Worcester's of 1847 were the pronouncing dictionaries then most in vogue in England. The very mention of the latter as one of the two works of this character highest in favor with Englishmen reduces to an absurdity the usage of London as a final authority. When the inhabitant of that city wished to satisfy his mind about the exact quality of that pure and perfect pronunciation, to the possession of which he is supposed to have been born, he proceeded

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half the time to consult the pages of an American lexicographer.

How, in turn, did this American lexicographer arrive at the knowledge of that usage which he was careful to proclaim as the standard? He was born in New Hampshire in 1784; he was graduated at Yale College in 1811; he afterwards taught school in Salem, Massachusetts, and in 1819 removed to Cambridge, in the same State, and there spent the rest of his life. In 1831 he went to Europe, and was abroad for a few months. This seems the only noticeable instance where he was away from New England for any length of time. During his brief absence from his own country he visited Scotland, France, Holland, and Germany, as well as England. Accordingly, his stay in London must have been very short at the best. Precisely who it was

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there who supplied him with the unadulterated article of pronunciation in use in that city, or whether he picked it up by his own unaided efforts, the account given of his life neglects to inform us. Certainly, if he ever secured it by personal study on the spot—and that is the only course of procedure that would entitle him to be spoken of as an authority—it must have been during the few weeks that he was there. At all events, however obtained, he imported it. Then, after purifying it in the atmosphere of Cambridge and Boston, he exported it to England. It was in this way that the Londoner frequently got his pure London pronunciation from a citizen of this country who was never outside of New England for more than a few months of his life.

This account of the origin of the Lon-

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don usage furnished by Worcester has been given as if it were the result of genuine investigation pursued by him on the spot. As a matter of fact, nothing of the kind took place. It was in the following way he arrived at it. He studied in his own library the pronouncing dictionary of everybody who had taken the pains to compile one, whether he were Englishman, Irishman, Scotchman, or American. Wherever they differed, he recorded their variations. Out of these he selected the particular pronunciations which suited best his own taste or for any reason commended themselves to his judgment. To them he gave his approval. Almost inevitably they would be the ones he was in the habit of using himself and of hearing generally used by those with whom he associated. Out of this conglomerate

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the usage of London, so far as Worcester can be said to represent it, was manufactured in America; and the article thus manufactured, if Ellis can be trusted, was largely accepted in England.

The truth is that the pronunciation of every dictionary expresses the preferences and prejudices of the particular person or persons who have been concerned in its compilation. At best it represents the taste of a select coterie to whose members the accidents of birth and training and circumstance have made familiar certain ways of pronouncing words. It is a question, indeed—or, rather, it is not a question—how far any individual, no matter how vast his acquirements, how wide his acquaintance, how extensive his opportunities for observation, can be deemed competent, in the case of a single disputed pro-

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nunciation, to speak for the whole of the English race whose usage is entitled to consideration. Under the most favorable conditions our means for arriving at a correct conclusion in any given case are necessarily restricted. We can talk with but a comparatively small number of persons; we can hear but a small number of public speakers. These are the only sources of direct information; and these are soon exhausted. For any extension of our knowledge we must rely upon the testimony of others. These, in turn, are subject to the same limitations as ourselves. At best, therefore, our mastery of the subject can be but imperfect. In consequence, when one says that he has never heard such and such a pronunciation, it is really no proof that the pronunciation does not exist, and perhaps exist on a large scale.

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No more arduous task can well be conceived than that of ascertaining the pronunciation of a whole people. This is so, even when the attempt is confined, as is implied throughout in this discussion, to the usage of the educated class. No one who properly appreciates the difficulty of the quest as well as its magnitude, would undertake it light-heartedly. No one who has studied the subject, even superficially, would care to express himself with much positiveness on many points. Yet there is nothing more common than to hear some person lay down dogmatically what is the universal practice of England or of America. In general it can be assumed with absolute safety that the man so doing, whether Englishman or American, is peculiarly ignorant of the usage of his own country. Orthoepists themselves,

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with all their attention to the subject, frequently exhibit their lack of knowledge, and are sometimes compelled to confess it. Walker tells us that until he had inspected the dictionaries he had not conceived that there could be two pronunciations of *hearth*. The examination of these revealed to him that there were authorities who gave its *ea* the sound it had in *earth*—the word, indeed, with which it is made to rhyme by Milton. Had he further read the reviews of the dictionaries which came out in his own time, he would have discovered that there were men to stigmatize as slovenly his practice of giving to the *ea* of this word the sound it has in *heart*.

Pronunciations, too, lost to orthoepic recognition in one quarter of the English-speaking world may be found employed and sanctioned in some other.



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Take the case of *lever*. The pronunciation *lěv'er* was the only one authorized by Webster in his original edition of 1828. It has been retained in that work ever since, though no longer made exclusive. The extensive circulation of this dictionary in America has carried to all parts of the land this particular usage. On the other hand, its existence is not even conceded, so far as my knowledge extends, in a single modern dictionary compiled in England. There it is invariably *lē'ver*. But this was not always the case. *Lěv'er* is the pronunciation authorized by some of the eighteenth-century orthoepists. It was probably the only one ever heard by Webster. And though utterly unrecognized by the dictionaries now brought out in the mother-country, it is far from unlikely that places can be found there in which it is still employed.

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In this matter no man, nor even any body of men, can cover the whole ground. How limited is the knowledge possessed by any of us, no matter who, of the pronunciation employed by our fellow-men of the same station in life and of the same degree of education can be made manifest by a notable example. There has already been occasion to speak of the late Mr. Ellis. He was an orthoepist of exceptional attainments. He joined to amplest scholarship in his specialty the most extensive observation. If any man could be pointed out as certain to be acquainted with all the variations of usage existing in his own land, he would in all probability have been the one selected. That he failed wofully in the slight attempts he made to give some conception of American pronunciation is not to his discredit. The data upon

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which he based his conclusions were inadequate and sometimes incorrect. In regard to his own countrymen, however, he was subject to no such limitations. Yet he tells us that he only knew of the pronunciation of *vase* which rymes it with *case*, "from Cull's marking." Here is meant Richard Cull, who was responsible for the orthoepy of Ogilvie's Comprehensive English Dictionary, published in 1863. Yet, at the time Ellis wrote, this sound of *s* had been fully recognized for a good deal more than a hundred years. It had long been a subject of discussion among orthoepists. It had been sanctioned by several of them besides the one mentioned — for instance, by Craig, in 1849, and by Latham, in 1870. Though Ellis had never heard the pronunciation, it must, accordingly, have been employed by no

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inconsiderable number of his countrymen.

Much more noticeable were his remarks upon *trait*. This French word, when adopted into English, naturally brought with it at first its French pronunciation. The final *t* was not sounded. This continued to be the case for an exceptionally long time. The word did not, indeed, come into very general use till after the middle of the eighteenth century. Dr. Johnson, though introducing it into his dictionary, spoke of it as "scarce English." As regards its pronunciation, that characterization remained largely true for more than a century. "Even now," wrote Latham, in 1870, "though the word is common, few venture to pronounce it as an English word." Mr. Ellis, in his observations on American pronunciation, selected the

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sounding of its final *t* as one thing sure to betray the nationality of the speaker. His words imply that in the United States the final letter was invariably heard, and that just as invariably it was never heard in England. As a general observation the remark was true; as a specific test it was likely at any moment to break down. Mr. Ellis's assertion was contained in a work published in 1874. Yet the pronunciation of the final *t* of *trait* had for more than a century been recognized by English orthoepists as allowable. Even as early as 1764 it was the single one sanctioned by Buchanan. A third of a century later Walker had declared that the *t* was beginning to be sounded. Accordingly, he authorized its use. It was not, indeed, admitted by Smart into his revision of Walker; yet in 1848 it was the only one

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given by Boag. In 1870 it appeared as an alternate in the dictionary of Latham, and similarly in 1872 in that of Chambers. Furthermore, within a few years after Ellis's observations had been published the sounding of the final *t* was not only adopted in works like the Imperial and the Encyclopædic, but preference was given to it. A complete change of front in matters of pronunciation is not the work of a few months or years. Dictionaries appearing shortly before and soon after 1874 did not authorize the pronunciation of the final *t* of *trait* unless Englishmen had been previously in the habit—to some extent at least—of so pronouncing it. As a shibboleth to detect the American the word in consequence was always liable to prove a failure. Still, if a man like Ellis cannot be relied upon to be familiar with the

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practice of his own countrymen, what confidence can we possibly have in those who undertake to speak for us all?

In days of old there used to be exhibited by many an almost touching faith in the verbal omniscience of lexicographers. If a word did not appear in the dictionary, it was assumed that it did not exist in the language. Probably very few educated persons can now be credited with this childlike trust in the completeness of any vocabulary. Yet it prevails with fullest force in regard to the pronunciation. There is little left of that old spirit which at the beginning questioned the authority of the compilers of works dealing with it, denounced them for the practices they authorized, and instructed them as to the usage which prevailed in the best society—which, it is needless to say,

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was the usage of the reviewer himself. Orthoepists, to be sure, have now taken care to avert, in a measure, criticism of this sort. They record the varying views of about every one who has gone to the trouble of putting his pronunciation into print—at least into a printed volume. So in modern times, just as we have variorum Shakespeares, we may be said to have variorum pronouncing dictionaries. This fact really exempts us from the necessity of paying to any one of these works that unquestioning deference which it does not venture to assume as due to itself. By giving us the choice of two or more pronunciations of certain words it disclaims any pretension to be recognized as a binding authority. The moment it concedes that one way is not the only way, what is to prevent him who consults it from insisting that there



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is still another and a better way which it has failed to record?

It follows, therefore, that while the pronouncing dictionary is an authority of more or less value, it is never a final authority. On this matter, having been concerned to some extent in the preparation of works of this nature, I speak from the point of view of personal experience. I have protested to no purpose against the authorization of certain pronunciations. I have succeeded in getting one or two sanctioned which had not previously been recognized as allowable. It is hardly necessary to add that the knowledge of these I shall take precious good care to keep to myself. But where did I get any authority, either in the way of protest or advocacy, over thousands of other English speakers, to decide how any particular word

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should be pronounced? From no quarter could it come, for in none did it exist. The simple explanation of the matter is that it was my fortune to be in a position where my personal preferences met with a certain degree of consideration.

In this matter the proper attitude for every educated man to take is that once exemplified by Dr. Bacon, for a long while the pastor of Center Church, New Haven. He was assailed for his pronunciation of a certain word. It was not according to Webster, he was told. The clergyman was personally acquainted with the man held up to him as a guide, and very evidently had an opinion of his own as to the respect due to him as an authority. That, indeed, may be thought to be countenanced in the excellent dictionary which bears the lexicographer's name; for it has been

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carefully weeded of a large share of the results upon which its original compiler particularly prided himself. At all events the doctor showed no disposition to submit to the correction. "What right has Webster," growled he, "to dictate my pronunciation? He is one of my parishioners, and he ought to get his pronunciation from me, and not I from him."

There is nothing peculiar in this attitude on the part of those who have paid close attention to the subject. No scholar, for instance, will question for a moment the knowledge of this whole matter possessed by the late Mr. Ellis, who has already been quoted. His eminence as an orthoepist would be admitted by all; his superiority would be conceded by most. To the right he had to speak with authority not a single one of the lexicographers who have been

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mentioned can make the least pretence. Yet this is what he said on this very point: "It has not unfrequently happened," he wrote, "that the present writer has been appealed to respecting the pronunciation of a word. He generally replies that he is accustomed to pronounce it in such and such a way, and has often to add that he has heard others pronounce it differently, but he has no means of deciding which pronunciation ought to be adopted, or even of saying which is the more customary." Here we have put in small compass the exact state of the case by the man who, while he was living, was usually reckoned among the very first, if not the very first, of English orthoepists.

This, however, is a doctrine not loved of the multitude. Each of us is inclined to cherish his Webster or his Worcester,

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or any other lexicographer he happens to select, and woe unto the person who does not submit to the authority he acknowledges. There is no objection, indeed, to any man's conforming his own practice to that of some particular guide. On the contrary, it is both convenient and comfortable; under ordinary conditions it may almost be called necessary. But there is decided objection to the disposition he is apt to display of insisting that the pronunciation which his authority teaches is the only one that can be properly said to exist, or, to put it a little differently, that can be said to exist properly. In this respect the modern Gileadite—to revert to the illustration with which this treatise began—has proved himself far inferior to his prototype. The latter knew that there were several passages of the Jordan, and

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took pains to secure them all. His sanguinary imitator of the present day, not conscious of the number in existence, fancies that when he has got possession of one, he has become master of the only crossing. Supremely intolerant and supremely self-complacent is the man who has been brought up on a single dictionary. Especially is this the case if he has happened to teach to others the pronunciation it gives, for so long a time that the employment of any different one seems to him of the nature of a blow at the very foundations of our speech. It is fair to admit, however, that this class of persons, once very numerous, have now come to be relegated more and more to the remotest recesses of the rural districts. The rapid multiplication of guides and manuals and lexicons during the last twenty

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years enables him who provides himself with them all to secure for his own private use almost any pronunciation he prefers. In the multitude of dictionaries there is safety; for it is then in our power to pit one lexicographer against another, and to assume a supercilious attitude towards the one who fails to authorize the pronunciation which we recommend by our own practice.

Nor, indeed, can we feel a sense of security in pinning our faith without reserve to the orthoepy of any single lexicographer. The original compiler may and sometimes does change his mind. If his work is successful enough to justify revision, he is not unlikely at a later period to concede some particular pronunciation to be permissible which previously he had been disposed to reject altogether. Consequently his disciple's

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opinion of what is improper, if not of what is proper, will depend in a measure upon the particular edition of the same dictionary which he chances to have in his possession. Even if the original compiler remain faithful to the pronunciation he first authorized, his revisers are sure not to remain faithful to him. They alter without scruple. There is not a single dictionary, successive editions of which have appeared, that has not undergone more or less of modification of the orthoepy it recommended. The practice of so doing began early. In 1797, when Sheridan had been but nine years in his grave, a fourth edition of his work was brought out, as its title-page declared, "revised, corrected, and enlarged." The name signed to the preface as the one responsible for the changes made was T. Churchill. Who-



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ever he may have been, one reason for his selection as reviser must have been on account of his supposed familiarity with the subject of orthoepy. Indeed, he tells us himself that to speak with propriety was an accomplishment of which he was early ambitious. At all events, many of Sheridan's pronunciations went by the board. In some instances the changes made will seem to modern ears for the worse and not for the better. For illustration, Churchill altered the pronunciation of *break*, which Sheridan rymed with *sake*, into *breek*, so as to ryme with *seek*. This may have a somewhat strange sound now, but it was no uncommon usage then. It may be remarked, in passing, that this latter pronunciation was disapproved by Walker on high philosophical grounds. The word, he as-

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sured us, was "much more expressive of the action when pronounced *brake* than *breek*, as it is sometimes affectedly pronounced."

But though diversity is likely to ensue to some extent from the multiplication of pronouncing dictionaries, it must be admitted that the influence of these works is, on the whole, conducive to uniformity. The reasons for this result are obvious. Orthoepists, as a class, are a very conservative body of men. They may almost be deemed timid. Every new competitor for the public favor is sure to consult the works on the same subject already in existence. If he himself has been in the habit of employing a particular pronunciation, and has been accustomed to hear it so employed in the society of which he forms a part, he is none the less awed when he

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comes to find it unrecognized as existing at all in good usage by the authorities to whom he more or less defers. He hesitates to sanction what none of his predecessors have seen fit to approve. He often does it, to be sure, but he does it reluctantly; and he sometimes refrains from doing it even when he has very positive convictions of his own. The result is that the same pronunciations of the same words are copied from one dictionary into another, and to a large extent transmitted from generation to generation. Moreover, all orthoepists are by their nature hostile to the exceptional and the anomalous. The weight of their collective authority is generally against deviations from the analogy of the language. Even when they submit, they are inclined to do it under protest. As on such points they

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all tend to agree, their agreement affects the practice of those who consult them, and this is a constant factor working to produce uniformity.

Furthermore, the dictionary, wherever it goes, carries with it very largely its own orthoepy. The work, if successful, reaches bodies of men scattered far and wide. It imposes upon the timid or the indifferent among them the pronunciations it authorizes; and in these two classes may be reckoned the immense majority of those who use it as a work of reference. The average man has no desire to incur the opprobrium which falls upon singularity. If he be at all sensitive to criticism—and most men are so—he prefers to fall in with the prevailing practice. This will naturally be the practice recommended by the dictionary having the widest circu-

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lation. The general adoption of what it authorizes causes its pronunciation to triumph by the mere weight of numbers. This was particularly observable of Walker's in the early part of the nineteenth century. Even now, in spite of numerous deviations which have come to prevail, it still remains true that he has continued to affect English orthoepy profoundly. The same thing can be said of Webster in America. The immense circulation of his dictionary in the United States after the middle of the nineteenth century has had a distinct influence in assimilating the pronunciation of all parts of the country.

No one, indeed, can compare the orthoepy authorized at the end of the eighteenth century with that authorized at the end of the nineteenth without becoming aware that there has been

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a steady movement towards uniformity. Many pronunciations then sanctioned by orthoepists of high repute are now no longer known at all; at least, they will be searched for in vain in modern dictionaries. Who now, for instance, knows of such a disease as *dys-en'tery*? Yet this is the accentuation of the word given by Dr. Johnson. Who would think now of pronouncing the *g* hard in such words as *gymnastic*, *heterogeneous*, *homogeneous*? Yet this was not unusual in the eighteenth century and in the early part of the nineteenth. The practice was defended on the ground that they were derived from the Greek, where the letter had the sound so designated. Such a course of action, with the reason given for it, kindled Walker's wrath to the highest pitch. "Both the learned and the unlearned coxcombs,"

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he wrote under *oxygen*, "conspire to pronounce this word as well as *hydrogen* and *nitrogen* with the *g* hard."

The remark just quoted is significant of the attitude taken frequently by orthoepists. Walker, in particular, did all he could to bully men into what he deemed correct pronunciation. No deviation from what he considered the analogies of the language met favor in his eyes. Others might tamper with the unclean thing. Not so he. By joining the two words in the same sentence, he plainly intimated his opinion that any one who gave to the first syllable of *idyl* the pronunciation *id* was little other than an *idiot*. Nares had consented to giving the hard sound of *g* to *gymnastic*. But he doubted, he said, a little the practice, though not the propriety. Walker understood him to

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express just the opposite opinion and was disposed to rebuke him for dealing with this heresy so mildly. "There can be no doubt," he wrote, severely, "of the absurdity of the usage and of the necessity of curbing it as much as possible." To curb it took a long time. The classical influence gave way slowly. As late as 1826 Walker's usage was in turn denounced and stigmatized. In the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* for November of that year Hogg is represented as speaking of an article in the preceding August number on the subject of what appears, as written there, *Jymnastics*. The speaker is at once taken to task. "Jymnastics!" says Tickler. "James—if you love me—G hard. The other is the Cockney pronunciation."

But though the pronouncing dictionary may do something, and even much,



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to produce uniformity, it cannot do everything. It is only occasionally consulted, while the word itself is seen frequently. This, in consequence, is likely to be pronounced according to any one of the numerous different ways which a language, arbitrarily spelled, easily permits. Hence, diversities of pronunciation are always cropping up; and, as has already been pointed out, it is largely a matter of chance whether or no any one of these shall find permanent record. It depends almost entirely upon the independence or the caprice of the particular man responsible for the orthoepy of a particular work. We must bear in mind that no dictionary ever recorded all the pronunciations which have been or are sanctioned by good usage. Some one of these hitherto unrecognized is in consequence liable at any time to pre-

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sent itself on the pages of a new compilation. This is a disturbing element which has always to be taken into account. The forces which produce uniformity are, on the whole, stronger than those which produce diversity; but they are not a great deal stronger. There is no question that a much more general agreement prevails in usage now than there did a century and more ago. Yet how far uniformity is yet from having accomplished its perfect work a brief statement will show. The International Dictionary gives a list of between fifteen and sixteen hundred words which are pronounced differently by different orthoepists. To this number the Standard adds several hundred. Neither of these most valuable works attempts to record pronunciations which once existed, and may still exist somewhere.

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Not even does the one which furnishes the fuller list include all that could have been given, and are, indeed, to be found authorized in modern dictionaries of repute. These facts speak for themselves. Uniformity of pronunciation among the men of our race is an orthoepic dream which, as matters now stand, has the remotest possible chance of being realized.

In truth, there is within limits scarcely any peculiarity, not to say atrocity, of pronunciation which cannot now plead justification from some authority of standing. This is but another proof that the orthoepy of works of this character represents not the ascertained practice of cultivated society as a whole but that of some particular region of country, or of some particular set, or occasionally of some particular individual.

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Even the New England provincialism *naytional*—so spelled by Lowell in the 'Biglow Papers'—can be found sanctioned by one of our most widely circulated dictionaries. In thus pronouncing the initial syllable it has yielded to a tendency which has at times swept along in its current orthoepists when dealing with certain other words. We can see it strikingly exemplified in the dispute which has gone on in regard to the word *knowledge* since at least the middle of the eighteenth century. To this day men can be found who indignantly insist upon pronouncing its first syllable like the verb *know*. The objection to so doing and to *naytional* is that such a course violates one of the very few orthoepic laws which continue with much tribulation to keep up a sort of struggle for existence in our tongue. This is that

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a derivative from a word whose vowel is long shortens the vowel of the primitive. The same rule applies also to compounds. Thus, for example, from *beast* we get *bestial*; from *cone*, *conical*; from *meter*, *metrical*; from *sphere*, *spherical*; from *zeal*, *zealous*; from *sheep*, *shepherd*; from *vine*, *vineyard*. Accordingly, from *nation* we should expect *nāsh-unal*, just as we have *nāatural* from *nature*. But in English orthoepy rules exist mainly for the purpose of furnishing opportunities for the creation of exceptions. It is almost needless to add that in the observance of the one just specified there has been no consistency. From its authority, indeed, partisans of classical quantity have always been much disposed to dissent. We can find in several works, for the orthoepy of which these men are responsible, *heroism* pro-

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nounced as *hē'roism*. Even *hē'roine* occasionally obtrudes itself upon the attention. It was probably under a somewhat similar influence that the authorizer of *naytional* sanctioned this particular pronunciation.

I am far, however, from wishing to be understood as objecting to pronouncing manuals and dictionaries. So long as we continue to write one language and to speak another they are a necessity of the situation. Nor need it be denied that there is a certain degree of peril in advocating the doctrine here advanced, especially for that by no means limited number of individuals who have acquired or unconsciously adopted pronunciations which are under the ban of cultivated society. It may also be attended with a certain degree of discouragement to such as aim to impart the

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best usage to those for whose education they feel personal responsibility. There can be no question that the adoption of the views here maintained would tend to chill enthusiasm. One has to believe firmly that social salvation or perdition lies in a particular way of pronouncing a word, to make him really earnest in the necessary and sometimes disagreeable task of correcting others. If all are to be saved, no matter how they pronounce, the missionary spirit has lost its strongest impelling motive. It is really, however, against the monstrous claims put forth for the sanctity of particular persons who set out to instruct us in orthoepy that the argument in this treatise has been directed. Yet any such line of reasoning is always liable to be wrested from its legitimate object into a disavowal of the

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necessity of heeding any instruction at all.

As a practical question, however, the acceptance of such a belief will not materially affect the action of any considerable number. In the matter of pronunciation few men could be prevailed upon to proceed independently. They prefer to be relieved of the necessity of deciding for themselves, and are ready to submit to the guide or guides recommended to them by those in whom they have trust. But, it may be asked, how can there be any instruction worth heeding if the position here taken is correct? We are told that no particular work of the many existing is to be accepted as authoritative. Can, then, the agreement of all be entitled to this epithet? If so, what is the nature of the logical process by which opinions



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individually worthless become by their combination an infallible guide? Objections of this sort have been raised against the view here expressed. They rest, however, upon a misconception. The individual work is usually entitled to high respect. So far from being worthless, it represents the best results reached by a certain person or by certain persons who have devoted time and thought and special study to the subject. They are usually trained observers who have employed all the opportunities at their disposal to familiarize themselves with the usage they deem best accredited. Their work, to be sure, is in a necessarily limited field; but that field they, as a rule, strive to cover carefully. The conclusions they draw and promulgate carry, therefore, weight under any circumstances. Under some

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circumstances they carry great weight. Accordingly, he who submits his own practice to that announced as correct by a particular guide is following a perfectly legitimate and sensible course. It is equally legitimate and sensible to enforce it upon those for whose education he is responsible.

This is the general rule. But it must be kept in mind that just here occurs an important limitation which most are too much inclined to disregard. The pronouncing dictionary which a man uses exists for his own guidance; it does not enable him to criticise the practice of those who dissent from its teachings. It will furnish a standard of authority, but not the standard of authority. It is nothing more than one of several standards, and, so far as the representation of the best usage is concerned, will be

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surely no worse than some and probably no better than others. The decisions of orthoepists are usually entitled to high consideration when they tell us how we have the right to pronounce. When they go further, and tell us how we ought not to pronounce, they are on much less assured ground. If this be true of them, it is much more true of those who consult them. He who desires to express positive opinions not merely upon what can be done, but upon what cannot be done, must be prepared to undergo the additional burden of familiarizing himself with the pronunciations authorized by all the numerous current guides which exist. Against their agreement it is ordinarily unwise to contend. It is only the man whose superiority of knowledge is universally conceded that can venture to challenge the correctness

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of the verdict rendered by all orthoepists, coming as they do from every region of the English-speaking world, and representing widely scattered and essentially different bodies of cultivated men. To those who have not reached the position of safety just indicated the advice given by Dr. Parr conveys the needed warning. He found fault with a gentleman for putting the accent on the penult of *Alexandria*. The latter defended himself by quoting the authority of Bentley, who in this particular had conformed to the classical practice. "Bentley and I," rejoined the old scholar, "may call it *Alexandri'a*, but you had better pronounce it *Alexan'dria*."

In the consideration of this subject I have confined myself mainly to the discussion of changes which have taken place during the last one hundred and

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fifty years. Before that time we must rely for any assertion we make upon inferences drawn from ryme or from plays upon words to be found usually in dramatic pieces, and upon observations contained in works which make merely incidental references to orthoepy. It is hard enough, as we have seen, to tell how the men of our own day pronounce. From the restricted sources of information at our command which have just been mentioned, we can get, accordingly, some faint conception of the altogether harder task of discovering how men pronounced in times past. In particular, the testimony from verse is always to be received with caution. The scarcity of ryme in our tongue, of which Chaucer complained, has compelled poets to treat as allowable for that purpose many words which are not precisely alike in

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sound. In the incidental observations, too, of writers, the personal equation has always to be taken into account. Rarely can we feel full assurance that the pronunciation alleged is the pronunciation of the community generally and not that of the individual or of a very few. These are the difficulties that meet us in attempting to ascertain the usage of the remote past. But beginning with the latter half of the eighteenth century we are on tolerably safe ground. Numerous dictionaries then appearing, devoting to orthoepy amplest consideration, give us a right to make certain positive statements. These works, it is true, are far from agreeing with one another; but a comparison of them all enables us to arrive at fairly accurate conclusions in regard to particular words, and to comprehend, in a

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way, the general trend of pronunciation.

The examples of divergence which have been given could have been very largely increased. But enough, it would seem, have been recorded in this slight survey of the subject to justify the conclusions which have been suggested or indicated in the preceding pages. For the sake of convenience it may be well to sum them up in a few sentences. The first is that no one pronouncing dictionary can be regarded as the final standard of authority. Nor, in the second place, can the concurrent voice of all of them put together be thus considered. It may, however, be conceded that their agreement approaches so near to this position that it is ordinarily unsafe for the individual to oppose his practice to their united authority. He is not likely

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to take, knowingly, that risk unless he has something of the spirit of the martyr and is fully prepared to encounter the martyr's fate. The least that can be expected by him who, through indifference or independence, runs counter to accepted orthoepic conventions, is to have inquiries made or insinuated as to the region of country from which he came or as to the character of the society in which he was brought up. Still, in his time of greatest trial he can be sustained by the reflection that there is nothing permanent about this general agreement. It is likely to be broken up at any moment by the entrance of a new authority with new deviations from the hitherto authorized usage. A third conclusion is that while uniformity is an ideal ever to be striven for, it is one which will never be fully realized. With



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our present orthography it can never be realized even remotely. As a practical question, indeed, this inability to attain it is of little moment. Educated men of our race can be understood by English-speaking educated men everywhere. If they are not, it is not the fault of their pronunciation but of their enunciation. Uniformity, too, would have its drawbacks for some. Scores of persons would be deprived of the pleasure they have in feeling that their individual way of pronouncing words is a mark of their social superiority.

But as things now are, uniformity of orthoepy is with us an impossibility. There can never exist that infallible guide for whose appearance we are all longing until the spelling of every English word carries with it its own pronunciation. Even then variation of accent

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must continue to show itself, though it will be reduced to the lowest possible limits. But how infinitely remote is such a prospect no one needs to be told. Even were the conditions all favorable, long and rough is the road that must be travelled before any such result could be reached in a language like ours which enjoys and rejoices in the distinction of being the most barbarously spelled of any cultivated tongue in Christendom. We are weltering in an orthographic chaos in which a multitude of signs are represented by the same sound and a multitude of sounds by the same sign. Our race as a race has, in consequence, lost the phonetic sense. What can we hope for the orthoepy of a tongue in which, for illustration, the short sound of *e*, found in *let*, is represented by *ea* in *head*, by *eo* in *leopard*, by *ay* in *says*, by

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*ai* in *said*, by *ei* in *heifer*, and by *a* in *many*? Or of the correspondingly long sound given by us to the same vowel, which is represented by *e* in *mete* (to measure), by *ea* in *meat* (an article of food), or by *ee* in the verb *meet*; and, furthermore, by *i* in *magazine*, by *ie* in *believe*, by *ei* in *receive*, by *eo* in *people*, and by *ae* in *aegis*? Or take the sound denoted by the digraph *sh*, seen in *ship*. It is represented by *ce* in *ocean*, by *ci* in *suspicion*, by *si* in *dimension*, by *ti* in *nation*, by *xi* in *anxious*, by *sci* in *conscience*, by *ch* in *machine*, and by *s* followed by *u* in *sure*. There is no object in heaping up further harrowing details, which, indeed, could be multiplied almost indefinitely. They have been introduced merely to show how hopeless is the prospect of attaining under such conditions a uniform standard of pro-

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nunciation which all will recognize at once, and to which all will unquestioningly bow.

The conditions, accordingly, are unfavorable on the side of the language itself; they are full as unfavorable on that of the users of the language. Most of us love our present orthography—love it for its uncouthness, its barbarousness, its unfitness to do the very work for which orthography is presumed to exist at all. We cling with passionate devotion to its worst anomalies. We not merely shudder at the prospect of changing a spelling which defies all attempts at proper pronunciation, but at one that in addition disguises completely the derivation, about which in other instances we profess to be profoundly solicitous. Even the pettiest alterations in the interest of a mere mechanical uni-

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formity meet with the sturdiest resistance. On this whole subject, indeed, there is no ignorance so profound and comprehensive as that which envelops the minds of many men of letters, if we can judge of the degree of their knowledge by the character of their utterances. It requires a far more enlightened opinion than prevails yet among the large majority of these before we can look for the success of any effort to cause our tongue to approach even remotely to the phonetic excellence of Italian or Spanish or German. Yet, until that time comes, no small share of our lives will be spent in the profitable and exciting occupation of consulting dictionaries, in the equally profitable and exciting discussion of the pronunciation of particular words, and in airing our opinions and delivering our decisions

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upon points about which one thoroughly educated man is as good an authority as another and nobody is an authority at all.

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